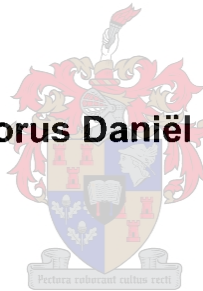


**DEFENCE AGAINST MARITIME POWER
PROJECTION: THE CASE OF THE CAPE OF
GOOD HOPE, 1756-1803**

by

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at the University of Stellenbosch**

Promotor: Prof A.L. Grundlingh

December 2006

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and that I have not previously submitted it in its entirety or in part at any other university for the requirements of a degree.

Signature

27/11/06
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Date

ABSTRACT

The Cape of Good Hope, located at the southern tip of Africa, was very important for maritime communication with the East in the days of sailing ships. As the competition between the strong European maritime empires for trade, sea power and empire in the East intensified during the late eighteenth century, control of the Cape became a primary concern.

The seventeenth century was the golden age of the United Provinces (the Dutch Republic) and through the VOC they dominated the trade with the East. By the late seventeenth century English (later British) and French trade picked up dramatically, with the result that the eighteenth century saw the slow decline of the Dutch state, sea power, sea-borne trade, industries, shipbuilding and the VOC. The vacuum left by the decline of the Dutch, was quickly taken up by their competitors. As French and British power eclipsed that of the Dutch and they fought each other, the United Provinces not only became a minor partner to one of them, but these wars also had a devastating effect on the Dutch Republic. During the same period British global interest grew and her trade experienced a staggering increase. With growing British interests in India and conflict with France, control of the sea route to the East and a secure base along this long and vulnerable route became essential to the British; which enhanced the strategic value of the Cape of Good Hope. The Cape was in Dutch hands, which was not a problem to the British if the Dutch were allied to them, or stayed neutral during a war, but if the Dutch were in an alliance with France, it posed a great threat to British interests.

Within the parameters of this thesis maritime power projection is the use of sea-borne military forces to influence events on land directly, while defence against maritime power projection is the separate or joint defensive efforts at sea and on land to counter maritime power projection. Defence of the Cape against maritime power projection essentially involved defensive efforts on three tiers or levels. Warships were present at times to deter an enemy fleet, or eliminate the threat it posed. Some important landing sites, beaches, anchorages and bays at the Cape were protected by a system of fortifications, while a garrison and militia forces were thirdly available to man fortifications and counter an invader with military force.

Navies were crucial and powerful foreign policy tools in the period under discussion. The maritime empires extensively relied on their navies to protect their trade, project their power, damage the interests of their enemies and defend their own interests. But, as the bases that had to protect the vulnerable maritime communications and provided safety to ships also

had to be secure, they were usually defended by a system of fortifications and a garrison. The fixed defences the maritime empires created at their posts or bases were typical of the developments in the fortification architecture of the West at the time and were primarily designed to provide defence against European adversaries. In terms of organisation, doctrine, weapons and tactics the armies of the maritime empires were again essentially European.

To restrain the high costs and due to the difficulties related to relying extensively on European soldiers, the maritime empires generally also relied on indigenously recruited troops. In fact, it would have been impossible to maintain these empires without local troops. At the Cape this had two components: first the local militia created from the able-bodied men (amongst the free burghers, VOC officials, former soldiers, retired officials, freed slaves and persons of mixed blood) living in Cape Town and the districts, and second the so-called Khoi Regiment, recruited in 1781-1782 and again between 1793 and 1803. It was not a Khoi unit in the tribal sense, but rather representative of a certain segment of the Cape population. The primary *raison d'être* for the militia and the Khoi Regiment was defence against an external enemy and they should not be confused with the so-called commando system that developed in the course of the VOC period for local defence purposes.

Chronologically the study commences in 1756 with the outbreak of the Seven Years War (1756-1763). This date is important because the Franco-British struggle rapidly escalated to the East and as a result the Cape acquired important strategic value to the belligerents. It was now no longer just a refreshment post on the long sea route to the East. During the ensuing wars, the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784) and the Wars of the French Revolution (1792-1802), Britain twice attempted to capture the Cape (1781 and 1795). The British attempt to capture the Cape in 1781 was foiled by the presence of a powerful French naval and military force, while in 1795 the Dutch capitulated to the British because the Cape was poorly defended and there was political division amongst the defenders. A Dutch attempt to recapture the Cape in 1796 ended in failure due to the formidable British defence of the Cape. The study is brought to a close with the handing back of the Cape to the Netherlands in 1803.

A central theme which forms part of the discussion is the way in which states used their naval and military power to achieve their national objectives, in other words the strategies of the maritime empires of the day. Consequently the achievements and failures of the various politicians, colonial administrators as well as naval and military commanders involved, were evaluated. Furthermore, the defence of the Cape is examined with specific reference to the organisation, nature and constitution of navies, fortifications, and armies of the time.

A special effort was made to place emphasis on the relevance of an integrated or joint approach to defence against maritime power projection and to identify a number of prerequisites for a successful defence. These include the joint or separate use of naval forces, fixed defences and landward forces with the purpose of defence. In addition elements such as proper command and control, intelligence, cooperation between armies and navies, and the value of clear strategic and operational objectives were emphasised.

OPSOMMING

Die Kaap de Goede Hoop se ligging aan die suidpunt van Afrika was uiters belangrik vir maritieme kommunikasie met die Ooste in die dae van seilskepe. Met die gevolg dat toe die magtige Europese maritieme moondhede teen die laat agtiende eeu kompeteer vir handel, seemag en Oosterse ryke, beheer oor die Kaap van primêre belang geword het.

Die sewentiende eeu was die goue eeu van die Verenigde Provinsies (die Nederlandse Republiek) en deur middel van die VOC het die Nederlanders die handel met die Ooste gedomineer. Teen die laat sewentiende eeu het Engelse (later Britse) en Franse handel drasties toegeneem, met die gevolg dat die agtiende eeu deur die stadige verval van die Nederlandse staat, seemag, see-gebaseerde handel, industrieë, skeepsbou en die VOC gekenmerk is. Die gaping wat die agteruitgang van Nederland gelaat het, is vinnig deur haar opponente gevul. Soos Frankryk en Brittanje magtiger geword het, het hulle teen mekaar oorlog gemaak en die Verenigde Provinsies het 'n mindere bondgenoot van een van die twee sterker moondhede geword, terwyl die oorloë ook 'n verpletterende effek op Nederland gehad het. Terselfdertyd het Britse wêreldwye belang en handel drasties toegeneem. Met die groei in Britse handel en belange in Indië, wou Britanje ten alle koste 'n veilige basis op die roete na die Ooste bekom wat weer die strategiese waarde van die Kaap laat toeneem het. Die Kaap was in Nederlandse hande, wat nie 'n probleem was nie indien die Nederlanders en die Britte bondgenote was of Nederland neutraal was, maar wat beslis 'n beduidende bedreiging vir die Britte ingehou het indien Nederland in 'n bondgenootskap met Frankryk sou wees.

Binne die bestek van dié proefskrif is maritieme magsprojeksie die gebruik van see-gebaseerde militêre mag om gebeure aan land direk te beïnvloed, en verdediging teen maritieme magsprojeksie is die afsonderlike en gesamentlike verdedigingspogings wat ter see en op land teen maritieme magsprojeksie plaasvind. Die verdediging van die Kaap teen maritieme magsprojeksie het essensieel uit verdedigingspogings op drie vlakke bestaan. Oorlogskepe was van tyd-tot-tyd beskikbaar om verdediging te verskaf, deur as afskrikking vire 'n vyandige aanval te dien, of 'n vyandelike vloot uit te skakel. Sommige belangrike landingsplekke, strande, ankerplekke en baaie is deur 'n stelsel fortifikasies beskerm, terwyl 'n garnisoen en milisiemagte laastens beskikbaar was om fortifikasies te beman en 'n invaller militêr teë te gaan.

Oorlogsvlote was belangrike en kragtige buitelandse beleidsinstrumente gedurende die periode onder bespreking. Die maritieme ryke het swaar op hul vlote gesteun om hul handel te beskerm, eie mag te projekteer, hul vyande se belange te skaad en eie belange te beskerm. Aangesien die basisse wat kwesbare maritieme kommunikasie moes beveilig en 'n veilige hawe aan skepe moes bied, beskerm moes word, is hulle gewoonlik deur 'n fortifikasie-sisteem en 'n garnisoen verdedig. Die vaste verdedigingswerke wat die maritieme moondhede by hul basisse of poste opgerig het, was tipies van die ontwikkeling in die Westerse vestingboukunde in die periode en hul hoofdoel was verdediging teen Europese vyande. Ook die leërs van die maritieme moondhede was in terme van hul organisasie, doktrine, bewapening and taktiek essensieel Europees.

Weens die hoë koste en die probleme verbonde aan die onderhoud van grootskaalse Europese leërmagte, het die maritieme moondhede gewoonlik op troepe wat plaaslik gewerf is, staatgemaak. Dit was teweens onmoonlik vir hulle om dié ryke sonder plaaslike troepe in stand te hou. Aan die Kaap het dit uit twee komponente bestaan: eerstens die plaaslike milisiemagte wat uit die weerbare manspersone (uit die geledere van vryburgers, VOC-amptenare, oud-soldate, afgetrede amptenare, vry slawe en persone van gemengde bloed) in Kaapstad en die distrikte bestaan het, en tweedens die sogenaamde Khoi Regiment wat tussen 1781-1782 en weer tussen 1793 en 1803 plaaslik gewerf is. Die eenheid het nie net uit lede van die Khoi etniese groep bestaan nie, maar was eerder verteenwoordigend van 'n spesifieke segment van die Kaapse bevolking. Die hoofrede vir die bestaan van 'n milisiemag en die Khoi Regiment was vir verdediging teen 'n eksterne vyand en dit moet nie met die sogenaamde kommandostelsel wat gedurende die VOC-tydperk vir plaaslike verdedigingsbehoefte ontwikkel het, verwar word nie.

Kronologies neem die studie 'n aanvang in 1756 met die uitbreek van die Sewejarige Oorlog (1756-1763). Dié datum is belangrik omdat die Frans-Britse stryd vinnig na die Ooste ge-eskaleer het en die Kaap gevolglik belangrike strategiese waarde vir die strydende magte gehad het en nie meer net 'n verversingspunt op die seeroete na die Ooste was nie. Tydens die volgende oorloë, die Vierde Anglo-Nederlandse Oorlog (1780-1784) en die Oorloë van die Franse Revolusie (1792-1802), het Brittanje tweekeer probeer om die Kaap te verower (1781 en 1795). Die Britse poging om die Kaap in 1781 te verower is deur die teenwoordigheid van 'n sterk Franse vloot-en-troepemag gefnuik, terwyl die Nederlanders in 1795 gekapituleer het weens hul onvoldoende verdedigingsvermoë en politieke verdeeldheid. 'n Nederlandse poging om die Kaap in 1796 te herower, het misluk weens die effektiewe Britse verdediging van die Kaap. Die studie eindig met die terughandiging van die Kaap aan Nederland in 1803.

'n Tema wat sentraal staan in die bespreking is hoe state hul vloot-en militêre mag gebruik het om nasionale doelwitte te bereik, oftewel die strategie van die maritieme moondhede van die dag. Gevolglik is die suksesse en mislukkings van die betrokke politici, koloniale administrateurs en vloot-en militêre bevelvoerders ge-evalueer. Verder is die verdediging van die Kaap ondersoek met spesifieke verwysing na die organisasie, aard en samestelling van vlote, fortifikasies en leërs gedurende die tydperk.

'n Spesiale poging is aangewend om klem te plaas op die relevansie van 'n geïntegreerde of gesamentlike benadering tot verdediging teen maritieme magsprojeksie en om 'n aantal voorvereistes vir suksesvolle verdediging te identifiseer. Dit sluit in, die afsonderlike of gesamentlike gebruik van vlote en vaste verdedigingstellings en landmagte vir die doeleindes van verdediging. Voorts is 'n aantal elemente soos deeglike bevel en beheer, inligting, samewerking tussen landmagte en vlote, en die waarde van duidelike strategiese en operasionele doelwitte beklemtoon.

PREFACE

The pages that follow represent an attempt to examine the nature of defence against maritime power projection at the Cape of Good Hope during the late eighteenth century. Its focus is not on the softer “war and society” issues, though much material relevant to the interaction between the military and society at the Cape in the period is to be found amongst its pages. It is essentially a study on the terrain of military history proper. To understand the nature of maritime power projection and defence, it must be placed against the proper background and within the context of time.

For centuries the sea was vital in the history of the Cape as the arrival and departure of ships could bring good and evil, wealth or ruin, conquest or announcements of peace, or above all change. Indeed the sea, or in actual fact the maritime link with the world, was an important determinant in the history of the Cape and invariably in the history of South Africa. As the sea route between Europe and the East transported vast riches, it had to be secured and a good, safe base along this route became essential. As a result the Cape gained pertinent strategic value from the late eighteenth century onwards and competition amongst the maritime empires of the day for control of the Cape became intense. It therefore had to be defended.

The defence of the Cape of Good Hope against a maritime threat rested on a number of pillars: First, a naval ability to intercept an enemy at sea, then a system of coastal defences had to be in place, and finally landward forces had to prevent an attack ashore from succeeding. Of the three attempts made to capture the Cape in the period under discussion, only one was successful. The exact course of these attempts and how the defence of the Cape was organised is what will be discussed in this thesis; obviously against the applicable theoretical background and within the context of time.

Grateful thanks are due to the Van Ewijck Foundation and the Netherlands-South African Society (NZAV) whose financial assistance facilitated my research at archives, institutes and libraries in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Though many individuals that deserve gratitude here, will remain unsung, a few require mentioning: my promoter Prof Albert Grundlingh for his trust and kind support, Dr Dan Sleigh for his advice and assistance, Maj Hennie Janse van Rensburg and SSgt Patrick Benn for creating the maps, Mr Natie Greeff for giving me access to the materials and maps of the Castle Military Museum, and Jacques and

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Thank You, for life, family and time.

Next, a steady wind, a following sea and a star to steer her by ...

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INTRODUCTION

*Chapter 1***THEORETICAL CONTEXT AND IMPORTANT POINTS OF DEPARTURE****1. THE CONTEXT OF TIME**

This study is an examination of the nature of defence against maritime power projection at the Cape of Good Hope during the late eighteenth century. As this is essentially a military history theme, a number of issues emanate from the contemporary use of military history. The use and value of military history is often interpreted as being as ambiguous as the use of history, while military history has continued to evolve (specifically in South Africa) in somewhat of an academic backwater. Why does military history have this status? This is nothing new as military history is often, mostly unfairly, associated with militarism while the societal abhorrence with the study of something as obscene as war perhaps adds to this. Furthermore, and probably of significance, is the recent crisis in mainstream history, which beyond doubt adds to a reduction in the status of military history.

To understand the eighteenth century and the history of the period under discussion, one aspect must not be negated: war was central to this period and it impacted on the nature of societies. In fact, "war was the principle and most costly state activity in the eighteenth century".¹ War must be placed in the proper historic context and must not be seen as a continuous and independent process that generated its own growth, unaffected by external change. Methods of warfare were always rooted in political and social change and were typical of the societies involved.

It is impossible to really understand the history of the Cape and the history of South Africa for that matter, without taking dire cognisance of the effect of "world time". The late eighteenth century was a period during which maritime empires competed for trade, sea power and valuable colonies. Though the Cape was not important as a trading post or colony, due to its geographic location it was perceived as being of strategic value for secure trade and the protection of empire in the East. Consequently it was drawn into the Anglo-French competition and confrontation for influence in the East, which happened at the cost of the once powerful, but

¹ H. Strachan, *European Armies and the Conduct of War*, p.10.

now declining, United Dutch East India Company (VOC). The history of the Cape is therefore connected with the variables that motivated the maritime empires and influenced world politics and economics in the late eighteenth century. In essence, growing British sea power and the subsequent establishment of British command of the sea had a vast influence.

Politics, war and economy cannot be divorced from each other – a fact which is very evident in this period, specifically as it was the twilight of Mercantilism. In the mercantilist era war was accepted as part of the activities of man, while commerce was a battlefield where trading companies, traders and merchant vessels operated as combatants with tariffs and trading boundaries as weapons. The perception was, as the eighteenth century economist Dutot explained, that traders, entrepreneurs and colonisers gave prestige to the state, while their achievements reflected its military and commercial brilliance. Commerce was a substitute for war and conquering trading possessions a feat because mercantilists maintained that the trading potential was constant; the state could only increase its share at the cost of other states. Successes therefore meant that one became richer and the other poorer, the power of one state was built on the ruins of another, and if one power decayed, it was met with joy by opponents. A spirit of opposition controlled relationships which resulted in serious commercial rivalry and often war, while non-violent aspects like monopolising trade, tariffs and restrictions on trade were like armed conflict. This was evident from the way in which Britain applied the Navigation Acts;² which obliged British trade to be carried in British ships.

Mercantilist notions emphasized that states had to sell more than they imported and national strength depended on a trade surplus and import controls, hence the stipulations of the Navigation Acts. In addition war now moved from the European centre to the periphery and became concerned with the control of sea lanes of communication and the dominance of markets. The trade wars that resulted were for economic reasons not humanitarian. The relationship between the size of the military establishments of a country and cash became obvious as governments had to balance military expenditure with competing claims on the treasury and the income of the state.³ In contrast with other economic theories mercantilism was more practical as trade did create wealth; wealth did facilitate the creation of larger naval and military establishments, which provided well handled navies and armies the opportunity to enhance the power of the state.⁴

² F.C. Spits, *De Metamorfose van de Oorlog in de 18e en 19e eeuw: Tien Historische Studies over Oorlog, Strategie en Legervorming*, pp.60-1.

³ H. Strachan, *European Armies and the Conduct of War*, p.8.

⁴ M. Howard, *War in European History*, p.48.

So, trade was important to the maritime empires, but how were wars conducted and perceived? The type of war European powers waged during the eighteenth century was limited war: wars were essentially fought by small groups of military professionals for limited political, economic and military objectives. As a result the type of conflict was often described as “civilised” (if war with killing and maiming at its core could be called that), while enlightenment philosophers such as Rousseau and Montesquieu constantly argued that it must be curbed even more.

The conduct of war during the eighteenth century was not subject to a single governing set of rules, yet war was limited in its scope and conduct and evidence suggests that an unwritten code of conduct existed. This was based on concepts such as honour and dictated the way states went to war. It included aspects such as the nature of diplomacy with wars being declared and treaties negotiated while the differences between war and peace were pertinent, non-combatants received different treatment than soldiers, while soldiers that surrendered became prisoners of war and were cared for in compliance with rules both soldiers and states accepted.⁵ The renowned German philosopher on war, Karl von Clausewitz, very aptly referred to the nature of warfare during the eighteenth century as follows:

“In those days an aggressor’s usual plan of war was to seize an enemy province or two. The defender’s plan was simply to prevent him doing so. The plan for a given campaign was to take an enemy fortress or to prevent the capture of one’s own. No battle was ever sought, or fought, unless it was indispensable for that purpose. Anyone who fought a battle that was not strictly necessary, simply out of an innate desire for victory, was considered reckless”.⁶

Subsequent to the French Revolution, warfare would become more aggressive and involve society as a whole on a scale never seen before. A general war that was to last for more than twenty years was unleashed – on Europe and on the world. The objectives of the belligerents would have a vast influence on South Africa, yet in military terms the operations that were conducted at the Cape early in this war, was eighteenth century in nature, scope and conception.

The United Provinces experienced a golden age during the seventeenth century and through the VOC they dominated the trade with the East. By the late seventeenth century English and French trade picked up dramatically, with the result that the eighteenth century saw the slow decline of the Dutch state, Dutch sea-borne trade, industries, shipbuilding and the

⁵ P. Browning, *The Changing Nature of Warfare*, pp.14-5.

⁶ K. von Clausewitz as quoted in P. Browning, *The Changing Nature of Warfare*, p.5.

VOC.⁷ The rivalry amongst the maritime trading empires had a devastating effect on the Dutch Republic. In its heyday it had vast monetary means at its disposal and could influence power relationships in Europe – unique for such a small state. It had powerful enemies in France and England (later Britain), who wished to pursue the demise of Dutch trade. Then, as French and British power eclipsed that of the Dutch and they fought each other, the United Provinces not only became a minor partner to one of them, but was also undermined by these wars. The vacuum left by the decline of Dutch sea power and the VOC, was quickly taken up by competitors. During the same period British global interest grew and her trade experienced a staggering increase. With growing British interests in India and conflict with France, control of the sea route to the East and a secure base along this route became essential to the British, which enhanced the strategic value of the Cape of Good Hope.

With the exception of the America's where European forces advanced inland very soon after reaching these parts of the world for the first time, in Africa and the East Europeans were essentially sea-bound for long. They exported spices, gold, slaves and other valuable trade goods from their coastal 'factories', while hanging on to a precarious maritime lifeline with home. By the late eighteenth century (and in the nineteenth century) this changed because of variables like the political instability in Asia and Africa, European rivalry which extended beyond Europe, colonial administrators and soldiers that started to claim large stretches of land in the name of colonial powers and the progress in Western military methods which made this style of warfare by comparison much more effective.⁸

The history of the European-Asian trade and of the two main competing companies, the VOC and English East India Company (EEIC), can logically be divided into three periods. During the first period (from 1600 to the late 1680's) an aggressive VOC expanded its influence with military force. The second period, to the middle of the eighteenth century, is one of commercial competition while the VOC became more reluctant to use its military power. As the focus of European rivalry shifted to India and the French disputed the rising British influence, the VOC desperately tried to limit the negative effects this encounter might entail, yet it invariably led to the third period (from around 1760 to the end of the eighteenth century) during which the

⁷ P.J.A.N. Rietbergen (ed), *A Short History of the Netherlands*, p.107; and C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600-1800*, pp.282 and 285-9.

⁸ D. Porch, 'Imperial Wars. From the Seven Years War to the First World War' in C. Townshend (ed), *The Oxford History of Modern War*, pp.94-5; and G. Parker, *The Military Revolution. Military Innovation and the Rise of the West 1500-1800*, pp.115-7.

EEIC took the lead.⁹ It is on the last period, and the effect these events had on the defence of the Cape, that this study will focus.

As the Netherlands was regarded as a British ally, Dutch neutrality during the Seven Years War (1756-63) caused some resentment amongst the British. During the American War of Independence (1775-83), as many of the Dutch republicans supported the American cause and the Netherlands proclaimed its Armed Neutrality in 1780, war with Britain was the logic outcome. France militarily assisted the Cape and thwarted a British attempt on the Cape in 1781. After Britain lost its American colonies, the emphasis of its overseas empire moved to the East. The defence of British possessions in the East and the vulnerable sea route that formed the link now became a crucial military and strategic objective to Britain. It is for this reason that Britain endeavoured from 1781 to 1795 to get hold of the Cape, the so-called "Gibraltar of the East".

When, during the War of the French Revolution, a British expeditionary force under Admiral Elphinstone and General Craig arrived at the Cape in 1795, the situation was rather different from 1781. The Cape Garrison was depleted, the colony was politically divided and in a state of turmoil. In addition the Stadtholder had fled to England and asked the Dutch authorities to allow British "protection". It divided the Cape even more and after a somewhat reluctant and at best haphazard defence, the Dutch capitulated. When the British took over, and during the First British Occupation of the Cape (1795-1803), they secured the Cape with a substantial naval force and a large garrison, while they also improved its fortifications. The British were committed to defend the Cape and foiled a Dutch attempt to retake it in 1796.

The British attempts to conquer the Cape of Good Hope in 1781, 1795 and again in 1806 must be associated with the value of India. By the end of the eighteenth century British interest in Asia had grown substantially in commercial and geopolitical terms, which was to some extent due to British efforts to acquire command of the sea, their wish to maintain a favourable balance of power in Europe, their rising industrial capacity that required outlets and also their aspiration to consolidate their power in India.¹⁰ The Cape was of very little economic value, while the economic exploitation of India was of fundamental importance to Britain. In fact, for the British Empire India was the "Citadel" – the principle headquarters of British dominion in the East.¹¹

⁹ F.S. Gaastra, 'War, Competition and Collaboration: Relations between the English and Dutch East India Company in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries' in H.V. Bowen, M. Lincoln, and N. Rigby, *The World of the East India Company*, pp.59-60.

¹⁰ E. Tagliacozzo, 'Trade, Production and Incorporation. The Indian Ocean in Flux, 1600-1900' in *Itinerario*, 1, (2002), p.80.

¹¹ G.S. Graham, *The Politics of Naval Supremacy*, p.43.

2. THE RELEVANCE OF A STUDY OF WAR

As this study is essentially a military history, this brings us to the value of a study of war, or military history. Invariably we might ask, what is the function of military history and can the study of military history and the conduct of wars contribute to our understanding of this interesting period in South African history?

According to the renowned military historian Michael Howard war is a distinct and repetitive form of human behaviour, it is intermittent, clearly defined and distinct criteria with regards to success or failure in war exists. Yet, its lessons are never clear – or only understood when it is too late. Military history is therefore often abused in the dogmatic or generalised approaches to “lessons learned” so often held within the military profession. To assist with our understanding of war a study of military history should be in width, in depth and in context. It would enable the student of military history to appreciate the nature of war, illustrate how war has shaped society and contribute towards professionalism.¹²

The study of history should have its own reward, yet despite the dangers of a “lessons learned” approach, the practical value of military history has often been proclaimed. As military history can be seen as the “corporate knowledge” of the profession of arms, it is necessary to provide the military leaders of tomorrow with a thorough understanding of the use of military power in all its dimensions. Before military commanders encounter the reality of conflict (something not of their own making, but they are called upon to manage it), they should enlarge their limited stock of experience, and the only way of doing so is vicarious - they must study military history. A study of military history should have didactic value, but this value is in the domain of providing knowledge and insight, not the drawing of direct “lessons”.

The principles of the military science are based on logic, but as with other sciences, these principles must be applied to examples and experiences, which make empirical knowledge very important as principles could be analysed and understood with the aid of the great variety of history. The relationship between theory and military history is a complex one. New theory is often influenced by military history as the theorists contributing to our theoretical framework usually analysed previous wars. Clausewitz provided us with a clear notion of this relationship as he stated that

¹² M. Howard, ‘The Use and Abuse of Military History’ in *The Causes of Wars and Other Essays*, pp.193-197.

“theory ... cannot equip the mind with the formulas for solving problems, nor can it mark the narrow path on which the sole solution is supposed to lay by planting a hedge of principles on either side. But it can give the mind insight into the great mass of phenomena and of their relationships, then leave it free to rise into the higher realms of action...”¹³

The first step in understanding war, Clausewitz reminded us, is a historical study that accords with the highest demands of scholarship. If uncomfortable facts and history do not correspond with theory, then the facts must not be suppressed, but the theory should be revised. History or the “great mass of phenomena” is therefore crucial to our understanding of strategic theory, as historical analysis forms part of the process of validating theory. Though our tactical, and even operational concepts, are fundamentally influenced by technology, strategic theory essentially remains the same.

The task on the shoulders of the military commanders of the future is thus a heavy one. In order to gain knowledge of war before the reality is encountered and to enlarge on a limited stock of actual experience, their only alternative is to read military history. Through history we can comprehend much about the contribution of the great commanders and the execution of their ideas, why certain methods were successful and others not, what the influence of politics was and which strategic principles could be relied upon.

Historians must not lose track of the impact of war on our societies and of war as a whole. Battles and campaigns must be studied as they are the processes through which wars were won or lost. To understand military history and warfare, the historian requires insight into strategy and to a lesser degree into tactics. War could not be understood by only listing the course of events, or the actions of specific individuals involved. No, the elements that impact on events must be understood, identified, defined and analysed. In fact the historian of war must understand the military science. The Clausewitzian notion is that war has its own grammar, but not its own logic. The logic of war is politics, something most historians understand. But an appreciation of the grammar of war is locked up in an understanding of the military science; in recognizing campaigns and battles; distinguishing between strategy, operations and tactics; and amongst other aspects, understanding the element of ‘friction’ in war, or those variables that made the conduct of war even more difficult.¹⁴

Therefore the study of military history is not merely concerned with an analysis of campaign detail, but also with the preparation for war in the broad and more interdisciplinary context. This implies understanding the phenomenon of war and its impact in terms of the operational conduct of war, as well as having a clear grasp of the horrific nature of war and its

¹³ K. von Clausewitz quoted in H. Strachan, *European Armies and the Conduct of War*, p.6.

far-reaching impact on society. Such an understanding would obviously require multiple, or subaltern, histories. Perhaps by fundamentally grasping the nature of war and fully understanding its impact on society, we can contribute towards eradicating it. To this extent military history contributes, as it analyses and describes war as a phenomenon, and endeavours to enlighten the future managers of conflict about its reality. Because, if they do not understand it – who should?

Based on the above one can argue that the contemporary purpose of studying military history is to inform judgements of the future; to provide a context for change by providing an informed vision and to promote an intellectual culture amongst the students of military history and military affairs. A distinction must therefore be drawn between a purely historical study of war, and a study of the military past that takes cognisance of the relevant strategic theory and its application, we can refer to it as military history proper.

That brings us to this study: what is it about and how does it fit into the focus on military history? It is a study on the terrain of military history proper. Its focus is the military dimensions of defence against maritime power projection, with a view of the relevant theory and its application and the context of time. A basic question that relate to the rationale of this study is, if it is possible to contribute to our understanding of defence against maritime power projection with a focus on this period? How did the masters of the Cape defend it by preparing for war, maintaining garrisons, building fortifications and utilising warships? Was it possible to effectively neutralise or counter maritime power projection by securing one's interest on land and at sea? These issues are addressed in the following pages.

Eighteenth century histories of the Cape usually focus on societal issues so fashionable in our time; the efforts to also know the history of discrimination, oppression and slavery, the focus on gender, an analysis of the socio-economic situation at the Cape, the monopolistic role of great trading companies and the contribution of great men (sometimes women) of the Cape. In histories that do address the military history of the Cape, the focus is often on only a facet of that history, without an effort to appropriately place it within the proper context of time and theory.

The central theme of this study could be linked to the Cape's boast of the nickname "tavern of the seas". Historically taverns were crucial on a long journey. Not even our contemporary appreciation of "one-stop service stations" on a long road comes close to explaining the crucial role taverns played for travellers, or in this case refreshment stations for

¹⁴M. Howard, *Clausewitz*, pp.25-6 and 34-5.

ships. Whilst they provided crucial refreshments, they were also places of rest and recuperation. Very important, they provided safety along a hostile route threatening not only the life and riches (and profit) but survival (here of states and their commercial interests).

On the other hand, to be the owner of the only tavern on a long oft-travelled route was even more important. It would be great to your friends, but not to your foes. Add to this scenario the maritime dimension, a route which was used for the transportation of fascinating riches, the geographic position of the Cape and the fluctuating and dangerous international political environment of the late eighteenth century. Then the prospects for real, dangerous and deadly competition over the control of this tavern is obvious. Naturally with brigands desirous to take your tavern, as owner you will prepare to defend it, while still doing business. Due to the geographical situation and the location of the tavern, the maritime situation once again comes to play. Those competing for the possession of the tavern are maritime powers and as there is no real landward threat, your enemy will project his power across the sea (maritime power projection), while you will have to defend yourself against a seaborne assault (defence against maritime power projection).

3. MILITARY POWER, MARITIME STRATEGY AND SEA POWER IN CONTEXT

An examination of defence against maritime power projection must commence with an effort to place it within the context of the relevant strategic theory. Many aspects relating to the theory of the military science are universal and not necessary linked to a specific time. The theoretical principles that could therefore be applied to this theme are factors that concern maritime power projection, the patterns and nature of warfare in the late eighteenth century, and universally accepted strategic principles.

A study of military affairs invariably involves how states achieved their objectives through the use of, or the threat of force. Put quite simply, the use of military power to achieve political objectives. Not only is the relationship between war and politics relevant, but also the relationship between war and cash. Perhaps it is a subdivision of politics, but as the history of the Cape showed, economic constraints have severely limited the ability to properly prepare for war, conduct proper military campaigns and achieve political objectives.

The destiny of the Cape was determined by war. Traditionally war was violence organised by the state and it had caused change and resulted in death and destruction. To legitimise it and distinguish it from other types of illegitimate violence, it was conducted according to a certain set of rules. The nature of a war is dependent on the objectives of the

war. As a result war is just the logical result of existing conditions and relationships. Conduct in war could be either offensive or defensive – all war plans and actions taken are either in one of these spheres or both in combination. If a belligerent wishes to take something from its opponent (supplies crucial for its existence or to invade territory), it is an offensive war, while if another endeavours to prevent an enemy from taking possession of something, it would be a defensive war.

However, when fighting on the offensive it does not only imply attacking, while in a defensive war one can also take the offensive. In the case at hand, there was always a threat to the Cape, made possible by offensive action in the form of maritime power projection and there was always a defender. But, defence could also be an active defence, going over to the attack when possible and by doing that, the defender actually minimised an opponent's ability to take the offensive. Strategy therefore is either offensive or defensive in nature. Generally, but not exclusively, it is the stronger power that wages an offensive war, while the weaker takes the defensive. The attack provides huge potential advantages, but then initiative and surprise are crucial to its success.¹⁵

Belligerents usually have mutually exclusive objectives, that is why war is so often the only solution and as a result the objectives are usually to force an enemy to concede and sue for peace rather than continuing with the war, in other words to break your enemy's will to resist and force him to accept your will. On land armies usually achieve this by defeating an enemy or occupying his land, while at sea navies cannot achieve this so easy, and if one of the sides does not concede to the maritime demands of another, warfare on land is often the outcome.¹⁶

The highest level of strategy is grand strategy, which has to do with how a state achieves its objectives by using all means at its disposal, including the use of force or the threat of force. Military strategy is the next level and is about using military means for political ends which would obviously include a land based or maritime or air dimension (during the period under discussion air power was obviously not a factor). Maritime strategy is therefore a subdivision of military strategy, but it is important to note that a clear distinction could be made between maritime strategy and naval strategy. Maritime strategy would include the co-operation with armies (and air forces) as well as the use of the whole range of maritime means of the state to reach its policy objectives; the scope of naval strategy would be more limited and indicate the use of naval forces on the operational level (therefore a subcategory of maritime strategy). In its wider

¹⁵ Instituut voor Maritieme Historie (hereafter IMH) Milo37, T.H. Milo, 'Oorlog, Strategie en Tactiek', unpublished paper, no venue and no date, circa 1950's, pp.5-6.

¹⁶ IMH Milo37, T.H. Milo, 'Oorlog, Strategie en Tactiek', p.7.

definition maritime strategy is “the principles which govern a war in which the sea is a substantial factor”.¹⁷ Maritime strategy is therefore not only about navies, but how to use navies in co-operation with other means to achieve objectives. In this thesis the term maritime strategy would be used, but it is important to note that although many of the well-known authors, such as Jomini, Mahan, Corbett and Richmond, used the term naval strategy to essentially explain events within the context of maritime strategy as explained above.

The fundamental objective of maritime strategy is to expand the sea power of the state. Mahan explained that maritime strategy (he used the term naval strategy), “... has indeed for its end to found, support, and increase, as well in peace as in war, the sea power of a country”.¹⁸ Sea power is based in the ability of a state to project its power over the oceans of the world and to regions in which it seeks to establish itself in wartime, and to prevent an enemy from doing the same. Sea power is therefore a crucial element of maritime strategy and of grand strategy. In the wars between England and the United Provinces in the seventeenth century and between Britain and France in the eighteenth century, an important “new” factor became a determinant in world history, this factor was sea power. It would determine the destiny of many states and nations. At times, great military feats on land were even negated because countries did not possess sea power and were not able to protect their possessions, or project their power across the sea. In this discussion sea power is an important variable, as in the end it was those that had sea power that could control and maintain the Cape.

Good maritime communication was essential for maritime empires since the sea was between them and their empires, trade (which ensured their riches) was carried over the oceans of the world and a substantial maritime capacity was necessary for successful maritime power projection. The commercial use of the sea and the projection of power are therefore at the core of maritime strategy. A states’ ability to use the sea for these ends despite adversity and prohibit an opponent from doing the same when a conflict of interests exists, is vested in sea power. Navies were crucial tools for implementing maritime strategy and their size and organisation depended on the roles which they performed and obviously on budgets. States had to decide if their navies should focus on coastal defence, commerce protection or raiding, amphibious warfare etc, and often designed navies for these purposes.

While it is not the purpose to investigate the theory of sea power in too much depth, a few more relevant elements, which have pertinent value for this study, should be briefly considered. As sea power is fundamentally concerned with the use of the sea in the interest of

¹⁷ J.S. Corbett quoted in P. Gretton, *Maritime Strategy: A Study of British Defence Problems*, p.3.

states, one should distinguish between the purposive interest of states, when the sea is used to reach its own objectives, and preventive interests, when the purpose of one state is to prevent another state from using the sea to its detriment. Use of the sea in times of conflict invariably implied efforts to command the sea, which was usually not viable as relative control of the sea by control over specific zones of communication, though difficult, was often the result. Even as this was difficult to achieve and often no more than temporary *sea denial* was possible.¹⁹

One of the primary functions of sea power was to be able to use the sea in military terms; for maritime power projection, or for the offensive or defensive use of naval forces. These uses of the sea are to a great extent what this study will focus on, but it must be emphasised that it can in no way be divorced from the use of the sea for the purpose of commerce. If it was not for the rich commerce and a strategically important sea route around the Cape, maritime power would not have been an important determinant in the history of South Africa. Furthermore, in strategic terms, trade and commerce required secure communications, which could be ensured by the application of naval and military power.

Usually sea power is thought to be determined by a number of prerequisites or elements. As a first, one can include the geography and physical conformation of a state, which had to do with its access to the sea, its approach to using the sea and the absence of strong continental opposition which might force it not to focus on the pursuit of sea power. Also if the population of a country was willing, able and keen to use the sea for commercial pursuits and it had a government that supported or even directed the maritime pursuits of its people, it could certainly develop as a sea power.²⁰ With these elements in place, a state could become a powerful sea power if it had strong international trade (with a big merchant marine to transport its riches), it maintained a strong navy (the military component of sea power which provided protection, denied its enemies the use of the sea and could project power), and possessed local as well as overseas bases and harbour facilities which provided security. But, its political leadership also had to understand the problems linked to its position and the effect gaining, maintaining or loosing its maritime ability might have. Obtaining and building out sea power might result in command of the sea and the most effective way of securing it in the end is by eliminating an enemy's navy. As the examples used will illustrate, this is indeed the position Britain was in, at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

¹⁸ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*, p.2.

¹⁹ Directorate of Naval Staff Duties, *The Fundamentals of British Maritime Doctrine*, pp.65-79.

²⁰ See A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*, pp.29-58 as well as discussions on the elements of sea power by authors such as Kennedy, Richmond, Corbett, Earl, Paret and many more.

4. CLARIFICATION AND DEFINITIONS

4.1. Maritime Power Projection

Within the context of this discussion maritime power projection was the capacity maritime empires had to use sea-borne military forces to influence events on land directly or to acquire territory by conducting maritime campaigns. Maritime campaigns were the operations conducted (by maritime and amphibious forces) aimed at gaining or maintaining control of the sea and projecting power ashore.²¹

The well-known British naval theorist Admiral P.H. Colomb explained that when a state projected its maritime power, territory was usually open to attack from the sea (in spite of local defences like fortifications and garrisons) if no warships were present to defend the surrounding sea. In attacking a territory from the sea, the following elements were crucial for success: Command (or rather control) of the sea, no unnecessary exposure to dangerous fire from forts,²² good co-operation between the naval and military commander and sufficient force for the attack. Failure was usually due to insufficient force, too much emphasis placed on the effect a fleet could have, or not enough speed (urgency) in executing the campaign. As a result, landings by a strong military force, sufficiently clear of fortifications, well-supported by a fleet should theoretically not fail.²³

The development of national navies during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had much to do with the rise of the various states and their power, their national geographic position and their international role. Navies became valuable foreign policy tools and assisted states with achieving national policy or strategic objectives.²⁴ For the maritime empires a navy was just a tool in a greater military machine. At sea it had to protect commercial shipping essential to their economies (the convoy system was already an institution by the late eighteenth century), blockade an enemy's ports to prevent him from being a threat at sea or conducting amphibious operations, prey on an enemy's trade and communications, limit an opponent's

²¹ Directorate of Naval Staff Duties, *The fundamentals of British maritime doctrine*, p.223.

²² P.H. Colomb, *Naval warfare. Its Ruling Principles and Practice Historically Treated*, p.430.

²³ P.H. Colomb, *Naval warfare*, pp.251 and 278.

²⁴ J.B. Hattendorf, 'Sea Warfare' in C. Townshend (ed), *The Oxford History of Modern War*, p.251.

freedom of movement or right of passage in a specific region, or intercept and destroy his warships and troopships as a defensive measure.²⁵

As Jeremy Black so aptly pointed out European powers “enjoyed an effective monopoly over long distance naval strength”²⁶ during the eighteenth century. Their trans-oceanic operations were also mostly directed against each other. Though a number of other naval powers existed, none were comparable to the Europeans. China, with a strong government structure and local naval means, no longer had the long range naval capacity of the late sixteenth century. Oman was to a large extent a maritime state, but its power at sea did not match the Europeans. The Turks were being challenged by an expanding Russian Empire, while the naval strength of the North African powers, though a substantial thorn in the flesh of European commerce, consisted essentially of privateers and was not a direct threat for the large heavy gunned European warships. The limited naval strength that existed in India was eliminated by the British. Other regional fleets in the East Indies could perhaps pose a threat to commerce, but not to heavy warships.²⁷

European warships of the era had developed into powerful titans with up to three gun decks, while the firepower of such large warships approached that of entire armies. European navies were specialized fighting forces with well located bases that provided access to the North Atlantic and hence to the oceans of the world. Due to their powerful navies the virtual worldwide maritime power projection by countries like France and Britain was possible and they could obliterate any naval opposition from the surface of the world's oceans – as only their own type, other large European navies, could offer substantial resistance.

As the projection of power took place across the sea, navies assisted with projecting power ashore and performed naval duties offshore. To gain control of the sea or deny an enemy its use was always important, specifically when a belligerent wanted to project its power ashore as amphibious operations were difficult and forces were vulnerable when conducting it. This was gained by firstly eliminating the threat an enemy posed (often by defeating him), secondly by maintaining a naval capability, or thirdly by neutralising an enemy fleet with a blockade.²⁸

²⁵ The roles navies performed through the ages are well discussed. However, Parker states it was the Dutch that first created a sea-going fleet capable of performing these roles. See G. Parker, *The Military Revolution*, pp.99-100.

²⁶ J. Black, *Warfare in the Eighteenth Century*, pp.130-3.

²⁷ J. Black, *A Military Revolution? Military Change and European Society 1550-1800*, p.62.

²⁸ G. Till, *Modern Sea Power. An Introduction*, pp.6-7.

In warfare at sea, as on land, there were two critical variables. First, a belligerent required a suitable base on a frontier (here, the coast) from where operations could be conducted and then it required an organised and adequate military force (or a navy) to deploy operationally. Maritime empires were essentially a “scattering of islands” dependant on the sea for communication with the world. The routes that formed the “link” had to be secured, just as the roads of Rome had to be safe for the legions. Rome had camps that provided the guards to secure the roads, while for the maritime empires it was bases. Such bases protected trade and communication and had to be defended against injury. When the maritime empires conducted wars in distant parts of the globe, then the requirement to have ports or bases for shipping (both naval and commercial) in distant regions became even more acute. As it was not always possible to move forces to problem areas quickly, most positions required sufficient forces and protection on a permanent footing. As naval bases were the only way to maintain squadrons far from home, warships could not defend the empire without them.²⁹

The strategic value of a base is linked to a number of important factors. To begin with, in geopolitical terms the geographic position of a base was central as much military, political and economic influence could be exerted from specific locations. Secondly, controlling a specific position might have important military implications, yet it must be noted that the mere existence of a base was not enough as a base is no instrument in maritime strategy without ships and military forces; therefore the maritime force that can be deployed from a certain base is really the crucial determinant. Then the ability to control or threaten seaborne communications from a base is important as it could lead to control of the surrounding sea, while denying an enemy its use. Enemy commerce could be raided or even destroyed from a base, while it made the protection of own commerce possible. Finally, the strategic value of a base was also enhanced if a maritime sphere of influence in a specific region could be established from such a position. According to the above criteria, the Cape definitely had the capacity to be an important base. Yet, it must be noted that the strategic value of bases was not the only relevant factor: its usefulness was also determined by its access to supplies and equipment, its port and repair facilities, and its security against a threat from the land and an attack from the sea.³⁰

The danger always exists of oversimplifying the value of empirical factors as discussed above, cognisance must be taken of the context of time and milieu in which a specific base becomes strategically important, while the strategic perception of a state also has much to do

²⁹ H.W. Richmond, *Imperial Defence and Capture at Sea in War*, pp.57 and 108.

³⁰ A. du Plessis, *Die Maritiem-Strategie Betekenis van die Simonstad-Vlootbasis*, pp.13-6.

with the relative value of a location.³¹ It is conditions such as wars and international tension, commercial rivalry and periods of peace that really determine the strategic value of a base. This is obvious from the history of the Cape, if anything; the relative value of the Cape was enhanced at this stage. However, in time it was also to change.

Sea power (both naval and commercial) was obviously essential for projecting power ashore, but navies contributed to maritime security in two ways: They established control of the seas by clearing it of hostile vessels, allowing friendly ships secure passage, while they also provided security by protecting convoys through hostile waters. Such convoys could be commerce, but also a force or supply ships necessary to conduct and sustain operations in distant theatres. Furthermore, sufficient naval power could deny the use of the sea for exactly such a purpose to an enemy. To control the sea implied a wide-ranging effort of national power, while protecting convoys only required a concentration in the immediate proximity of the convoy. However, both were dependent on having good harbours and safe bases along the route.³² This was exactly the position of the Cape of Good Hope as its strategic location on the southern tip of Africa (literally halfway on the way to the East) made it vital to maritime communications with the East, and therefore a prized possession. The Dutch (in possession of the Cape since 1652) understood this and endeavoured to create and maintain a defensive system adequate for defence against a European competitor, but as they had no permanent naval contingent available, defences consisted primarily of a system of fortifications and a garrison.

Decisiveness was the criteria for successful invasion or conquest, not the size and complexity of the force or the type of battles fought. Invasion is the crossing of a frontier, either on land or at sea. Land frontiers crossed by forces on the ground, while sea frontiers by sea.³³ At the Cape in the period under discussion, an invasion across a land frontier was not a serious security consideration. Numerous raids took place across land frontiers, but the essential defensive requirement of the Cape was to defend it against a threat from the sea – maritime power projection. The Cape was captured and successfully defended because of decisive actions.

Maritime wars often centred on efforts to hinder or destroy the maritime trade and transport of an opponent and protect one's own. Napoleon's remark that war is a struggle against the communications of an enemy has much relevance for maritime war. As the history of Britain had shown, command of the sea is one of the most important weapons in the history of

³¹ A. du Plessis, *Die Maritiem-Strategiese Betekenis van die Simonstad-Vlootbasis*, p.14.

³² A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*, p.514.

³³ H.W. Richmond, *Imperial Defence and Capture at Sea in War*, p.117.

war and ensured the prosperity of states. As the sea is everywhere, small or neutral states are not untouched by maritime conflicts. If a strong state possesses extensive sea power, such conflicts could either bring about the ruin of small and neutral states, or force them to concede to the demands of powerful states.

The threat of maritime power projection was one thing, but to perform amphibious landings on the coast of an enemy and succeed, was a difficult undertaking. The history of amphibious operations are very old, as examples abound in ancient and mediaeval history of the principle of transporting soldiers across the water and supporting armies ashore with ships. Since the earliest times an amphibious assault was recognised as one of the most dangerous of military operations. To land and deploy forces on an enemy's shore, was indeed a remarkable exercise of power. Amphibious operations enabled a state to project its force without having to first gain right of passage over the land of another. Furthermore, as long coastlines were often poorly defended, it could provide an attacker with many staging points.

Transporting troops across the sea was and is risqué without command of the sea, or at least the possibility to establish local sea control. Navies were generally very inflexible and were limited in conducting tactical operations while escorting a large convoy with troops and many transport vessels. Power was often projected to other parts of the world without having command of the sea, but then the strategic situation usually were such that the country despatching the force was at least certain that they could establish temporary or local superiority, or control in the theatre of operations.

Amphibious operations were precarious, as the attacking force was extremely vulnerable during the actual landings, often under fire, in open boats on a beach with a surf running. The attacker then had to establish a beachhead ashore to support further operations as expediently as possible. Warships were valuable as they provided naval gunfire support and logistic support for the forces ashore. But, if the attacking force were not able to break out from the beachhead and successfully conduct further operations ashore, the whole endeavour was doomed.

Combined action by naval and land forces often provided many advantages, as the side with the maritime capability could at times choose where and even when to fight. It could attack the rear or flanks of an opponent, could facilitate the redeployment of force or quickly deploy reinforcements if necessary. Napoleon understood this well when he remarked that the British Royal Navy and only 30 000 men could paralyse 300 000 men of the *Grand Armée* and place all his operations under threat.³⁴

³⁴ IMH Milo37, T.H. Milo, 'Oorlog, Strategie en Tactiek', p.7.

4.2. Defence against Maritime Power Projection

The Cape was more than just a refreshment post; to the maritime empires it was a strategically important link between Europe and the riches of the East. As a result it had to be properly defended against the onslaught of a potential enemy. But how was such defence organised?

Not a single definition or coherent strategic approach in which defence against maritime power projection is expounded could be traced, but the defence measures to be taken are known and it forms an inherent part of the theory on the role of navies, the nature and organisation of coastal defence and amphibious warfare, and of the function landward defence forces perform. Definitions in the literature are normally limited as the focus is usually on a specific sphere of defence only.

The closest definition in the literature is probably that of coastal defence. *Coastal defence* can be seen as the efforts to interdict a hostile naval force, such as an amphibious force and could include shore batteries or defences along a coast.³⁵ Though this definition is workable, it does not allow for the contingency of defence, if naval forces were unsuccessful and if coastal defences failed to stop an invading force, in other words the function of the defending army. In theory, armies were always the logic next step in defence against invasion from the sea, if the other two measures failed. Yet, it is not discussed as part of the same theoretical framework. In this sense the theoretical approach in this work is new: defence against maritime power projection is ideally an integrated three tiered approach. It is therefore the naval efforts to interdict, destroy or restrain a hostile naval force; linked with fixed coastal defences to dispel sea based forces, prevent enemy landings, or deter an aggressor; in association with the landward defensive forces providing effective defence against a landward threat, or with the capability to eliminate an invader. As such it is a layered approach that firstly depends on the role of naval forces, but if defence in this tier would be unsuccessful, the focus moved to fixed defences or fortifications, and to landward forces that had to expel an invader. These tiers can obviously function in isolation, but an integrated or joint defence approach would be the most effective.

The advantages of the defence are varied. They include depth, often strategic depth, which could either be the result of geography, or could lie in the defensive depth a strong navy provides at sea. Then of course fortifications and obstacles could be created to inhibit an

³⁵ J. Baylis, et al, *Strategy in the Contemporary World. An Introduction to Strategic Studies*, p.124.

advancing force and landward defence forces had to be able to provide defence or destroy an enemy by doing battle with it.

Defending the Cape of Good Hope against maritime power projection was essentially conducted in three ways. At times warships were available to provide defence, deter or eliminate an enemy fleet, protect own shipping, patrol coastal waters and safeguard trade. In addition, anchorages, possible landing sites and important towns were protected by a system of forts and fortifications. Finally garrison and militia forces were maintained to man fortifications and provide military resistance against a belligerent. This is exactly what was examined with this study; how the masters of the Cape neutralised or countered maritime power projection by securing their interest on land and at sea.

Already in the sixteenth century, when their fleet destroyed the great Spanish Armada aimed at invading England, the English had a clear grasp of the value of a navy in defence. They considered a sea border and a navy as a more secure border than any other border. In the words of Sir Walther Raleigh, England's best security was a navy, as it was "the best way to keep our enemy from treading upon our ground" while without a navy they would be unable "to debar an enemy from landing". But, the common wisdom went further and they knew transporting an army across the sea was fraught with danger, while without a dominant naval force one should not embark on it. Furthermore, the sea was essentially only a highway transporting the livelihood of states and trade of states. As trade was linked to command of the sea and prosperity of states, Raleigh intuitively pointed out, "Whosoever commands the sea commands the trade; whosever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world, and consequently the world itself".³⁶

Except for the case of the Anglo-Dutch Sea wars, examples of conflicts where armies were not used are extremely rare. It was possible to isolate an enemy with a blockade, but total exhaustion with a blockade would usually take a long time. To just threaten an enemy's coast from the sea did not mean much, but if an attacker had the ability to project power and perform amphibious landings, the whole picture changed. The defender then had to work out a way to defend against such maritime power projection and the first line of defence was a navy. As many examples in the history of the world indicate, battles at sea often came about as a result of a threatening amphibious landing, in other words, in defence against maritime power projection.

Theorists have generally accepted the role of navies in defence of territory against a sea bound attack. Mahan stated the "best coast-defence is a navy; not because fortifications are not

absolutely necessary, but because beating the enemy's fleet is the best of all defences".³⁷ For the famous Admiral Lord Nelson it was quite clear that the best defence against maritime power projection was to destroy the enemy's fleet, as he stated when he had to defend the island of Minorca: "I consider the best defence ... is to place myself alongside the French".³⁸ From the Richmond perspective the "true defence of Dominions lies primarily in dealing with the enemy's fighting forces at sea".³⁹ This was a common approach at the time, as the discussion will show.

Analysis of sea power in the period under discussion has focussed on the concepts of *command of the sea* and *sea control*. Though early theorists have used them as interchangeable a difference should be noted: *command of the sea* rather pertain to "oceanic dominance" and was interpreted by theorists like Colomb, Mahan and Richmond to mean the freedom with which one nation can use the sea without significant opposition and therefore deny its use to an enemy.⁴⁰ More recently *sea control* is seen as *command of the sea* more limited in time and place and can be defined as "the condition that exists when one had freedom of action to use an area of sea for one's own purpose for a period of time and, if necessary deny its use to an opponent".⁴¹ Within the Mahanist approach *command* could be obtained by destroying an enemy fleet, and the tool to obtain maritime dominance with, was an experienced and proficient global or blue water navy. Yet, an alternative viewpoint exists in *local* or *regional sea control*, which implies that "a global fleet is not necessary to establish control over a particular area of the sea, at a particular time, and for a particular purpose".⁴² A particular global navy might have so many responsibilities and be so thinly stretched that it cannot prevent another navy from establishing *local sea control*. Contrary to *sea control* is *sea denial*, which is "the ability to prevent an opponent from using the sea without attempting to establish *local sea control*".⁴³ This is for example when a weaker power (or a continental power) attacks the sea borne trade of an enemy that is a maritime state, while the weaker power does not have the same dependence on maritime commerce.

³⁶ A. Van Hengel, 'Het karakter van den zeeoorlog en de bescherming van de handelsscheepvaart' in *Marineblad*, 39 (1924), pp.434-7.

³⁷ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812*, Volume I, p.321.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ H.W. Richmond, *Imperial Defence and Capture at Sea in War*, p.145.

⁴⁰ Directorate of Naval Staff Duties, *The Fundamentals of British Maritime Doctrine*, p.66; and J. Baylis, et al, *Strategy in the Contemporary World. An Introduction to Strategic Studies*, p.123.

⁴¹ Directorate of Naval Staff Duties, *The Fundamentals of British Maritime Doctrine*, pp.66 and 235.

⁴² J. Baylis, et al, *Strategy in the Contemporary World. An Introduction to Strategic Studies*, p.123.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

This was specifically illustrated in the eighteenth century by Admiral De Grasse in North America and by Admirals De Suffren and Elphinstone at the Cape. During the War of American Independence De Grasse prevented a British army from being supplied from the sea, which in the end caused the British surrender at Yorktown, while at the Cape De Suffren had temporary local sea control around the Cape and prevented Johnstone from attacking the Cape. Britain took note of the situation.⁴⁴ A few years later Elphinstone controlled the waters around the Cape, while Admiral Lucas could not succeed in even temporarily denying his opponent the use of the sea.

As navies were the first line of defence, they had to ensure the security of bases or overseas territories. Without naval protection they were open for an attack from the sea, or could be cut-off or blockaded if an enemy obtained local control of the sea. So, if naval protection failed or it was isolated, bases had to be capable of holding out in land operations on an extensive scale.⁴⁵ How would the naval defence take place? The ideal would be for the defender to destroy or defeat an enemy fleet with a battle or a series of battles when it appeared, in other words not to even allow an expeditionary force to reach the shores of its target. In addition the defender could maintain a strong fleet to deter an enemy from approaching the coast or conduct maritime operations within his operational area. Finally, a blockade of the enemy coast could be maintained to prevent him from having the freedom to despatch an expedition across the sea. The British approach was to stop an enemy task force as early as possible, preferably in Europe, by either interdicting it or destroying it when it leaves port if in any way possible. Alternatively ports could be blockade to prevent an enemy from sailing in the first place.

Sea trade has been the lifeblood of the world economy and specifically island nations such as Britain prospered as a result of it. Due to its enormous value attacks on commerce is common in war. One must distinguish between commerce raiding, a tactic, and commerce warfare, a strategic approach. Commerce raiding is an age-old tactic. Also known as *guerre de course*, it is essentially the destruction of an opponent's merchant shipping in wartime by warships or privateers (armed with a *letter of marque*). In this way much damage was done to an opponent's trade around the oceans of the world and it was often how weaker states went about to gain an advantage over a stronger maritime power that depended on trade. Commerce warfare on the other hand is the interdiction or disruption of maritime commerce by a stronger fleet, it usually included blockades intended to 'starve out' an enemy by denying it access to raw

⁴⁴ IMH Milo37, T.H. Milo, 'Oorlog, Strategie en Tactiek', p.12.

materials needed to manufacture the instruments of war, or even food supplies and other necessities. When the blockaded navy, usually the weaker, wanted to break a blockade, it exposed itself to destruction. French privateers for example conducted a *guerre de course* against British shipping, but Britain waged commerce warfare against France.

By the eighteenth century the convoy system was common practice in war and an effective defensive measure. Already in 1597 the Dutch States-General for example instituted the first formal measures to protect Dutch trade, which was in effect up to 1795. It included regular patrols in the North Atlantic, warships were kept on stand-by, merchantmen had to be armed, and merchantmen were convoyed in specific areas and in the approaches to the Dutch coast.⁴⁶

Naval theorists like Richmond emphasised that the capture of enemy shipping at sea and defence against maritime power projection was utterly interrelated. To project power across the oceans involved the movement of an army, which required a large number of ships, both naval and commercial vessels. If an enemy could be deprived of transports, it would not have the mobility it needed to move large forces and would not be able to maintain operations across the sea. "There can be no greater security, nor any form of defence, which causes less loss of life, than depriving an enemy of his transport vehicles – ships".⁴⁷ British strategy in the period under discussion almost always involved dispatching an army overseas to capture an important post, or in defence of an important establishment. Britain required adequate shipping to be able to do it, but without sufficient shipping her opponents could not pose a threat to British security.

Hence, Dutch and French shipping was obviously a major target for the British. It was a source of wealth and by capturing it, Britain limited the ability of her enemy. If they did not have adequate ships available, the Cape (when in British hands) could not be attacked and it added to its protection. Due to the enormous value of the cargoes onboard the East Indiamen, both the shipping at the Cape and the possession had to be defended. Without a secure and defensible port on the route shipping was all the more vulnerable or even worse, if the only safe port on the route was in the hands of an enemy in time of war, the effect could be detrimental.

A final aspect regarding war at sea is how could success be measured? Success is often measured statistically – by counting losses or gains. Tactical success in battle is only a function of strategy, as it is only a means to a strategic result which is in essence to defeat an enemy or to force it to concede to your will. A tactical victory is only of value if it has strategic

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H.W. Richmond, *Imperial Defence and Capture at Sea in War*, p.111.

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A. Van Hengel, 'Het karakter van den zeeoorlog en de bescherming van de handelsscheepvaart' in *Marineblad*, 39 (1924), pp.441-2.

impact, moreover, even a tactical defeat could be a strategic victory and a tactical victory could be strategic defeat.⁴⁸ More important than tactical success was which side controlled the theatre of war afterwards, and who was able to transform operational gains into strategic victory.

In most societies, from prehistoric to recent, forts and fortifications have always been some of the largest and most complex buildings or system of buildings in the defence machinery. These defensive systems developed because of the requirement of societies to defend themselves against powerful enemies and they were the vehicles through which societies expressed their concern for defence or the protection of their territory. Defensive systems traditionally used in various parts of the world differ, not in terms of the principle of defence, but in their nature and construction. Their construction and complexity were determined by factors such as the level of military technology available, the wealth and ability of the society that created the defences, the geographic characteristics of their location, the nature of an anticipated attacker and it was also influenced by ideology and other social processes.

Fortified posts, castles and naval bases were of prime strategic importance for the maritime empires of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and during wars opponents often fought for their control. Well-placed effective fortifications were important in the defensive as well as in the offensive. In the defensive, they were crucial for the defence of territory, while protected anchorages provided safety for hard pressed warships or merchantmen, seeking refuge from war or weather. If threatened by a superior naval force, weaker forces could stay under the protection of a fort without risk, awaiting the ideal opportunity to confront the enemy.⁴⁹

Forts were often well located, making it very difficult and risky to attack with ships. Forts were much more stable gun platforms and usually above sea level, which had a fundamental impact on range and accuracy in an age of direct fire.⁵⁰ The result was that opposing forces would often blockade a base in an effort to “seal” it off, conduct amphibious landings out of range of forts and attacked forts from behind. Offensively maritime power projection hinged upon strongholds to conduct operations from. While armies were responsible for the control of the land area, naval forces had to take the offensive from secure bases. Hence, forts protected forces until the opportunity arose to act offensively.⁵¹

⁴⁷ H.W. Richmond, *Imperial Defence and Capture at Sea in War*, p.256.

⁴⁸ IMH Milo37, T.H. Milo, ‘Oorlog, Strategie en Tactiek’, p.15.

⁴⁹ C.E. Callwell, *Military Operations and Maritime Preponderance. Their Relationship and Interdependence*, pp.60 and 77.

⁵⁰ A.T. Mahan, *Naval strategy. Compared and Contrasted with the Principles and Practice of Military Operations on Land*, p.435.

⁵¹ C.E. Callwell, *Military Operations and Maritime Preponderance*, pp.78 and 124; and A.T. Mahan, *Naval Strategy*, pp.283, 287, 293 and 435.

Though defensive positions could be very formidable and difficult to capture, they only had value if they were the main focus of an attack or if an enemy attack could only achieve success by neutralising such defences or capturing them. As it was often possible to outflank fixed defences, take them from behind or even isolate them, the value of well placed fortifications or fortifications is therefore obvious.

In defending territory against maritime power projection, landward forces in effect conducted defensive operations. They had to await the landing or attempted landing of an attacking force. Then they could either endeavour to prevent amphibious landings, or destroy the offensive capacity of an enemy force after it had conducted landings by inducing it with military power to depart or surrender. Ideally the defending landward forces should conduct defensive-offensive operations with a strong military force in an effort to attack and crush an invader as quickly as possible. A strong military force can obviously also act as a good deterrent and dissuade a potential aggressor from even considering amphibious operations in the first place.

Crucially for defence against an enemy capable of conducting amphibious landings was the mobility of landward forces. Landward forces had to be able to move men and equipment to the crisis area as quickly as possible in an effort to dislodge an enemy before it had time and the opportunity to properly establish itself. In such a contingency, and in the defence of a large geographic area like the Cape, cavalry fulfilled a crucial role. While the main body with its infantry and artillery was preparing itself to take the offensive and marched towards the crisis area, cavalry had to hinder an enemy and impede its progress with hit-and-run actions, by isolating it from the local population and by preventing it from acquiring provisions.

A standing European military force was always available at the Cape. However maintaining a large regular force was expensive and to limit high costs, the maritime empires of the day regularly recruited indigenous troops.⁵² At the Cape this had two components: First the local militia, which consisted of all the able-bodied men in Cape Town and the districts. Secondly, both the Dutch and the British raised a so-called Khoi regiment as a standing unit to assist with the defence of the Cape.

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D. Porch, 'Imperial Wars. From the Seven Years War to the First World War' in C. Townshend (ed), *The Oxford History of Modern War*, pp.97 and 108.

5. **AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The problem this thesis endeavours to investigate is fourfold: to identify and define the theoretical background applicable to an analysis of defence against maritime power projection; to apply the relevant theory to the defence of the Cape; to evaluate the performance of the defenders of the Cape; and to make relevant deductions on the nature and characteristics of defence against maritime power projection.

The aim of the thesis is therefore to examine the multi-faceted defence of the Cape of Good Hope against maritime power projection from 1756 to 1803.

To achieve the aim the history of the Cape had to be placed against the background of relevant international events and the relative value of the Cape for the maritime empires of the day had to be established. A golden thread in the military history of the Cape of Good Hope in the period under discussion is its value to the maritime empires of the day and the competition to control it. But, why was it so important, why would one side venture to capture it against high odds and another to defend it? As a result the growing value of the Cape as a possession must be investigated as it changed from a replenishment station, to a military and naval station of great strategic value for the maritime empires. An important question to be answered is: was the defence of the Cape part of a greater worldwide strategy for its colonial masters?

As the Cape was part of a wider world in which great empires competed for hegemony, this leads to a next issue, what were the local conditions at the Cape like and was it possible to properly defend it? The changeable fortunes of the Netherlands and the decline of the VOC is of great importance, as it did not only influence the ability of the state and the VOC to provide the military and financial support required at the Cape, but also impacted on the local situation and local conditions. Too little money, political division and economic hardship certainly impacted on proper defence and as a result the assessment of local conditions forms an inherent part of the discussion. This off course raises the following issues: Were sufficient resources available to defend the Cape and did it impact on defence? How did the maritime defence of the Cape impact on Cape society? Was the local population organised and mobilised for defence, and was special military units created?

Given this international and local environment, how well did the defenders of the Cape manage in the face of a threat? The defence organisation and the defence of the Cape form an integral part of the discussion. The focus is therefore on regular military forces, foreign regiments based at the Cape, locally raised forces, the creation and maintenance of fortifications

and fixed defences, defence planning, and on the crucial function naval forces performed. The discussion include an evaluation of all attempts, failed as well as successful, to capture the Cape. They are placed against the relevant background and examined with a view of the applicable theory. Finally, an effort was made to answer the following questions: Does an appropriate theoretical framework for evaluating defence against maritime power projection exist? What was the nature of defence against maritime power projection and under which conditions were proper defence possible? Was the proper defence of the Cape against maritime power projection possible, or was the Cape too vulnerable to defend against a concerted assault?

The discussion will steer away from moral issues and having to judge colonial administrators, soldiers and sailors as good or bad from a contemporary ethical viewpoint. For example, the builder of the VOC Empire in the East was as recently as a few decades ago referred to as a great Dutchmen, "...alles en allen beheerschende reus ... een der grootste, zoo niet de grootste Nederlander, die in onze historie ooit heeft bestaan",⁵³ while today it would not be uncommon for many Dutch commentators to regard him as a knave. So, the thesis is not at all about issues such as how justified were European states in building up their trade empires and should they have established themselves in the East and Africa in the first place. Neither is there judgment on the ethical aspects of the colonizing efforts, the treatment of the various segments of the population and the effects such actions had. Where judgement will be passed, is on military matters and on the performance of colonial administrators, soldiers and sailors in such affairs.

6. **SOURCES AND RESEARCH**

A large variety of sources, primary as well as secondary, were consulted in compiling this thesis. Though it is impossible to discuss all, reference will briefly be made to the approach and to a number of the most important sources.

This study is essentially based on primary sources, both archival documents, published archives and transcribed documents electronically available. The archival documentation consulted is in the Cape Archives Repository in Cape Town, the Nationaal Archief (National Archives of the Netherlands) in The Hague, the National Archives of the United Kingdom (formally the Public Record Office) in Kew, the Brenthurst Library in Johannesburg, the National

⁵³ D. de longh, *Het Krijgswezen onder de Oostindische Compagnie*, p.8.

Maritime Museum in Greenwich, and the Instituut voor Maritieme Historie in The Hague. Specifically the archives of the VOC, the Dutch state and the British archives that pertained to military matters, the defence of the Cape, the movement of soldiers and military units and the movement of ships (more particularly naval vessels) were of pertinent value. In describing military and naval operations information contained in reports and journals from the commanders as well as the shipboard documentation was found to be invaluable, though seldom consulted, sources.

The available archival sources of the period are vast. Specifically the archive of the VOC is impressive in terms of its volume and completeness. Generally the VOC documents in Cape Town and in The Hague are in a good condition and easy to use. The documents in Nationaal Archief are well indexed and with the aid of a computerised inventory it is quick and easy to even find individual letters and reports. Minor difficulties were experienced with some material relating to the Batavian period as a fire in the archive of the Naval Ministry destroyed much of these archives in 1844. Many facets are only restored burned fragments, yet sufficient information was available in readable format for the purpose of this study. Though the documents at the Cape are well preserved, it is at times more difficult to find your way, specifically as the numbers by which it was indexed and the page numbers had changed.

From the late 1770's onwards the number of documents generated on military matters at the Cape rose, which is an indication of its increasing strategic value. During the 1750's, 1760's and early 1770's military matters were seldom the focus at Council of Policy meetings, yet by the end of the 1770's it was completely the opposite as war broke out in North America and spread to the East. In fact, from then to the end of the VOC era, meetings were sometimes held with defence issues as the only point of discussion. British documents show much clarity about the value of the Cape to Britain and with the Cape in British hands (after 1795); it is evident in the sources that the defence of the Cape was part of the greater security of the empire.

An important prerequisite for archival research on the period is to have a thorough understanding of Dutch, of the handwriting of the period and preferably at the least an elementary reading knowledge of French. Correspondence with France and its representatives was obviously in French and specifically during the 1780's, with French military and naval assistance, many of the sources relating to defence are in French. In addition much of the foreign correspondence with the Dutch as well as foreign correspondence with the VOC authorities at the Cape were in French due to the prominent status of French as a diplomatic language. Foreign language letters (also English letters) attached to VOC documents like the

resolutions of the Council of Policy usually have a Dutch translation, except in the case of French correspondence.

Published and transcribed archives are of great importance to any student of the period. Specific notice must be made of the seven volumes entitled *Kaapse Archiefstukken* edited by K.M. Jeffreys that contains VOC documents at the Cape between 1778 and 1783. Just as important are the *Records of the Cape Colony*, Volume I-IV, edited by G.M. Theal, which contains a large variety of British documents pertaining to the history of the Cape between 1793 and 1803. These volumes contain a wealth of information that ranges from Proceedings of the Council of Policy and the Dagregisters at the Cape, to correspondence between political decision-makers and military commanders. Their value is patently obvious to any student of history and they are an essential source of information.

Valuable information on the naval, maritime and military history of the Cape is to be found in a number of publications by the Royal Navy Records Society. Specifically *The Private Papers of George Second Earl Spencer*, *The Keith Papers* and *The Private Papers of John, Earl of Sandwich* were used. These publications comprise private letters and papers as well as official correspondence without which the writing of this history would have been very deficient. In general these volumes are quite complete with a large variety of documents on the various aspects of history with which these distinguished gentlemen were involved. However, two noteworthy exceptions exist, which might indicate decided efforts to manipulate history, or the way in which specific people are remembered.

The first is Lord Sandwich: in the very comprehensive Sandwich correspondence about naval and military affairs during his tenure as First Lord of the Admiralty Board, no reference is to be found of the Johnstone fiasco of 1781. A number of earlier (and insignificant) letters from Johnstone on American affairs and naval matters are included, yet papers on the large Johnstone expedition that involved such a great force (nearly 50 ships and soldiers), a naval battle and had many repercussions, are missing. The Sandwich papers at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich and the National Archive in Kew also contains nothing significant. Why not? The correspondence and reports relating to the Johnstone expedition that could be traced, is letters written during the expedition and thereafter and is mostly about Johnstone's relationship with his officers. Nothing official that could amount to orders or directives from Sandwich to Johnstone could be found. It is as if it was obliterated on purpose. A specialist on eighteenth century naval matters at the National Maritime Museum suggested that perhaps Lord Sandwich's vanity might have dictated which documents were to be saved for posterity!

The second example is Admiral Elphinstone (Lord Keith) and the “missing” Gordon letters. On 12 October 1994 four previously unrecorded letters from the Historical Archives at Bowood House (the seat of the Marquis of Lansdowne, linked to the Elphinstone family) were offered for sale at Christies in London. They are now in the Brenthurst Library in Johannesburg. These letters seemed to have been removed on purpose from the rest of Keith’s correspondence, they were not recorded, did not form part of the published Keith papers or of the initial collection in the possession of the Brenthurst Library in Johannesburg. These letters touches the essence of a tragic and controversial figure, Colonel Gordon, as three were written by Gordon and one by his wife. The impression is that it was not so much a manipulation of history, but perhaps an effort to protect Gordon’s legacy. (See the discussion in Chapter 8.)

With regards to published letters from persons at the Cape, two sources should be noted. The first is the *Briefwisseling van Hendrik Swellengrebel Jr oor Kaapse Sake, 1778-1792* edited by G.J. Schutte. Though there is certainly no shortage of material on this period, the Swellengrebel correspondence is interesting as it sheds light on how many of the affluent members of the Cape society, both officials and burghers like Hendrik Cloete, interpreted events at the Cape and it is specifically valuable concerning the events of the 1780’s. The published *Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas*, edited by A.M. Lewin Robinson, gives a very insightful picture to life at the Cape during the years of British occupation. Anne Barnard was not an official, but her husband was, she was well acquainted with Henry Dundas and she had constant contact with the British colonial and military authorities. As a result one gets a “first hand” and unofficial picture of the attitudes and opinions of those that controlled the Cape.

Regarding transcribed archival sources electronically available, the *Tanap* project was a giant leap forward. The *Tanap* project was created to preserve the VOC archives as a component of the mutual heritage of Europe, Africa and Asia and to create awareness of their importance among the parties concerned. With the aid of information technology VOC archives were made more available and accessible, so that it can be consulted more easily by scholars and the general public world-wide. In this way it was hoped to improve research and bolster international co-operation.⁵⁴ As a first part of the project the Resolutions of the Council of Policy of the Cape of Good Hope, from 1652 to 1795, was transcribed. As the Council ruled the establishment and the proceedings include reports and a large number of letters, it is an excellent record of all the important issues concerning the colony. On the *Tanap* website the researcher can conduct searches by date, geographical name, ship name, reference number or

by using the free search function.⁵⁵ This is indeed an exceedingly valuable tool for any student of the history of the Cape and the VOC.

A number of publications from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by travellers, sailors and soldiers that visited, or lived at the Cape, exist. Most of these sources were perused for military content or discussions on military matters. However, in general most lack military content and also do not discuss the international political system of the day, or the strategic value of the Cape. Furthermore, information is sometimes contradictory, often have errors and it is sometimes difficult to establish what to believe/use and what not. Yet, despite such shortcomings, these sources are an interesting picture of the time, and provide much insight into the Cape of the eighteenth century.

A large number of eyewitness accounts and personal recollections of the events discussed were utilised. Some are very accurate, while others are often very biased. The recollections by Lieutenant P.W. Marnitz, H.D. Campagne and Captain A.J. Knock on the events of 1795 and 1796 are probably the most animated accounts available. Though both were very critical of Gordon and his conduct and could not be regarded as objective sources, much of their stories are verified by the recreated versions of events and specifically the account by Marnitz is factually quite accurate. Campagne emphasised the view that a conspiracy in which the Cape authorities participated to hand it over to the British and even though his record is factually good, when reading it one is constantly aware of his perception of the whole debacle. As he was arrested, confined to the Castle and deported, the slant in his work is no surprise. The journal of Captain A.J. Knock, who was a member of Admiral Lucas' ill-fated mission to the Cape in 1796, may be factually quite good, but makes for interesting reading as Knock was a conceited revolutionary. His support for the French Revolution and the principles it represents is beyond doubt and he is damning of any other viewpoint.

Seafarers provided an interesting picture of the Cape. To mention just two: The famous Captain James Cook was a first rate observer who painted a clear picture of the Cape, from the perspective of a seafarer who's tired ships and exhausted crews were in urgent need of repair, replenishment and recuperation. Generally his account of the Cape is fresh and positive, while he emphasised its value to shipping. Captain Cornelis de Jong of the Dutch frigate *Scipio* was at the Cape from March 1792 to May 1793 and again from the end of 1794 to May 1795. As he escorted VOC convoys to and from the Cape, his official position as well as his close personnel

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See 'Objectives of the Tanap Programme' in <http://www.tanap.net/content/about/objectives.cfm> (accessed in 2005).

friendship with Commissioner Sluysken gave him good insight into the events taking place in the Colony, while as a professional officer he understood defence matters well. De Jong's account of the Cape is a first hand account, he was a fine observer and it is accurate and reliable.

Many British publications of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are important and relevant sources as they emphasise the value of the Cape to the British Empire, contain many references to military matters and discuss the capture or defence of the Cape. They are typical of the period; an era known for constant international commercial rivalry and near constant war with France, while Britain focused on the safety and security of trade and empire (the source of its wealth). Good examples are Barrow, Percival and others. Barrow was a conceited British imperialist. British actions were always appropriate and they had a proper appreciation of issues. He is unflattering towards anything not British or supportive of Britain and he is very derogatory towards the 'boors'. Percival discussed military matters and the best way to capture the Cape, but stated that his suggestions were hints to officers of more mature judgement and greater experience. It is obvious from these sources that control of the Cape was seen as important to the empire.

A large number of published sources and thesis were utilised. Many of these sources are not concerned with the military history of the Cape, but rather with its political and socio-economic history. While some of these sources are very accurate, quite a number were compiled without proper archival research and contain many errors. No thorough analysis exists of South African seaward or maritime defence as a whole, or of defence against maritime power projection during this period. Sources on military or naval matters usually have a limited scope and are not placed against a relevant military theoretical background.

Conversely, though a large variety of histories of the VOC exist, one is surprised to find so little on the military history of the VOC, while much of it is at best fragmented. Yet, the VOC was to a great extent also a military organisation, that had gained its trade position with force of arms, and had to protect its trade interests and possessions with military might. Though it fought many indigenous wars, its enemies were not only indigenous armies in Asia, but powerful maritime empires with western military systems.

Despite the large variety of sources it is possible to highlight a few sources. With regards to VOC history, the considerable body of work by F.S. Gaastra is specifically remarkable and provides a clear picture of the VOC as a vast and complex organisation. Despite shortcomings and the fact that some of his work is lacking as it provided a chronologic picture of

our history, but not a focus on the development of institutions and policy, the contribution of G.M. Theal to the history of this period should never be judged too lightly. Theal's work includes volumes of transcribed material and many volumes on South African history. It is simply a vast legacy and he had a remarkable ability to deal with so many aspects of our past primarily from archival sources.

In addition special mention should be made of a few other secondary sources. In *Die Nederlandse Kommissarisse en die 18de Eeuse Samelewing aan die Kaap*, A.J. Boeseken provided a thorough and very trustworthy account of the contribution the VOC Commissioners to the Cape made, also on military level. Two more sources which are very valuable for any student of the period is H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse bewind, 1795-1803*, and D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*. Both these publications are well researched, comprehensive, reliable and significant works.

On specific military matters the following must be mentioned: The account by C.J. de Villiers, *Die Britse Vloot aan die Kaap, 1795-1803*, is a meticulous description of the British Royal Navy at the Cape from 1795 to 1803, yet it is unfortunately essentially a narrative and not an analysis of the greater issues surrounding British sea power. The same applies to some extent to H.F. Nel, *Die Britse verowering van die Kaap in 1795*, as one would wish for more military strategic analysis. The *Hottentot-regimente aan die Kaap, 1781-1806*, by J. de Villiers is a good record of the creation of a local Khoi military unit and the role it performed in the defence of the Cape. An important contribution was made by T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche en Fransche Republieken van 1795 tot 1797*, who provided much insight into the French-Batavian negotiations, and the failed Lucas expedition. As he thoroughly researched the diplomatic history of the period, he clearly illustrated the effect of political ineptness and poor military command on military operations.

Works by naval historians and theorists of note were consulted. Special effort was made to not only use theory on sea power expounded by contemporary theorists, but to also understand and focus on how theorist explained sea power and naval matters in and after the period under discussion. Specifically the following works (and some of them are actually very good histories) should be noted: three works by A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812* and *Naval Strategy. Compared and Contrasted with the Principles and Practice of Military Operations on Land*; three works by H.W. Richmond, *Imperial Defence and Capture at Sea in*

War, The Navy in India 1763-1783 and *Statesmen and Sea Power*; P.H. Colomb, *Naval warfare: Its ruling principles and practice historically treated*; J.S. Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*; A.R. Kravenhoff van de Leur, *Militair-Historische Schetsen: over de Noodzakelijkheid van de Kennis der Krijgsgeschiedenis: Land-en Zeemacht in de 18e eeuw*; and F.C. Spits, *De Metamorfose van de Oorlog in de 18e en 19e eeuw*. Most of these theorists were also serving officers that reached flag rank.

The mechanics of seafaring, specifically during the great age of sail are alien to many historians and few have the required technical knowledge about ships and sailing to grasp available sources to the full. Much of the history of seafaring and its nature in the great age of sail is therefore prone to oversimplification and full of general assumptions, without taking the inherent problems of sailing and ships of the time into consideration.⁵⁶ As far as possible an effort was made to put aspects relating to the handling of ships and sailing against the proper background of the time and point out the specific limitations pertaining to ship handling and sailing. Sources were also used with proper appreciation of naval and maritime matters. As a result the emphasis is not only on military theory, but on the use of the correct military and naval jargon and the accurate use of concepts.

Specifically as far as the historiography of maritime warfare and South African military history is concerned, historians often rely too heavily on what other historians (not students of the military science) had to say. Glorious or inglorious events in history are discussed and relayed in detail without reference to its strategic effect, without placing it against the context of warfare, or without enhancing our insight into this complex phenomenon. The danger is: if historians only provide an overview of events without drawing conclusions, then we will be denied insight into trends and patterns and the relationship between seemingly isolated events. The course of history would be a riddle – an interesting tale to read but not one that add to our understanding of some of the most influential and complex aspects of our existence: war.

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S.B.A. Willis, 'Fleet Performance and Capabilities in the Eighteenth Century Royal Navy' in *War in History*, 11 (4), 2004, pp.373-4.

PART I
VOC DEFENCE OF THE CAPE IN A CHANGING
STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, 1756-1778

Chapter 2

SMALL PART OF A BIGGER WHOLE: THE VOC WORLD AND THE DEFENCE OF THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE, 1756 - 1778

1. INTRODUCTION

Trade with the East held many riches and the Dutch established a large Eastern trading empire under the control of a united trading company (the VOC) in the early seventeenth century. As slow sailing ships had to carry the rich trade along a sea route around Africa, a refreshment post for shipping was established at the Cape of Good Hope, but the vast riches inherent to this trade also brought strong competitors, which made a military organisation imperative. An empire acquired, to a great extent through the barrel of a gun, had to be well defended. To understand VOC history, one must recognize that the VOC was not only a trading company, but also a belligerent in the Indies. Throughout its history, it was involved in military operations in the East, projected its power in the region and it had to defend itself against its competitors. As its main competitors were other European companies or states that projected their power across the oceans of the world, defence was designed against such a threat.

The Cape of Good Hope was an inherent part of the bigger VOC world and the competition between the maritime empires of the day. As a result the destiny of the Cape must be explained against the background of the history of these maritime empires. The Cape was always defended and where it initially served only as a trading post; due to the increasing competition between Britain and France, it gained significant strategic value as the “key” to the East, in the middle of the eighteenth century. Yet, as the United Provinces (Dutch Republic) and the VOC was in decline, the ability of the Cape to defend itself against maritime power projection, was not equivalent to its value. The rise of the VOC is concurrent with the independence and rise of the Dutch Republic, just as the decline of the VOC in the eighteenth century is concurrent with the decline of the Dutch Republic.¹

For the VOC the Cape of Good Hope was a half-way house, a place of refreshment for their maritime traffic with the East and their objective was not to establish a colony. VOC policy at the Cape aimed at maintaining peaceful relations with the local population and preventing other European countries from establish themselves in the area.² However, the Cape steadily

¹ V. Enthoven, ‘Van Steunpilaar tot Blok aan het Been. De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie en de Unie’ in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie tussen Oorlog en Diplomatie*, p.36.

² M. Verstegen, *Indische Zeeherberg: De Stichting van Zuid-Afrika door de VOC*, p.102.

expanded into the interior, its population gradually grew and it became a place where different peoples met. Through conflict, conquest and immigration the foundation stones of a new society were laid.

The focus of this chapter is on the VOC world and the defence of the Cape of Good Hope during the third quarter of the eighteenth century. Accordingly the establishment, organisation and defensive system of the VOC will be discussed to provide relevant background and explain the competition between the great maritime empires of the day. The Cape was part of the greater VOC system, but because of its unique history and strategic location it was also different to other VOC establishments, an aspect which is emphasised in the discussion. Besides relevant background information, the chapter commences chronologically with the outbreak of the Seven Years War in 1756 and ends in 1778, during the American War of Independence. Though the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War only broke out in 1780, by 1778 France became involved in the war against Britain and it quickly spread to the East. Soon the war impacted on the Cape, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

2. THE VOC WORLD AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE

2.1. The Creation of the VOC and its Competitors

During the sixteenth century the Portuguese dictated the European spice trade from Lisbon. After Spain had conquered Portugal (in 1580) it placed restrictions on Dutch traders and they decided to acquire the spices from its source. Based on the information in the travel accounts of Johan van Linschoten and others who had travelled with the Portuguese; two Dutch expeditions reached the East during the last five years of the sixteenth century. Dutch trade with the East and trading companies mushroomed, but competition between the various Dutch companies was fierce and it became obvious that success was in cooperation. In January 1602 representatives of the various companies met in The Hague on the invitation of the States-General. A united company was created, called the “Generale Vereenighde Nederlandsche G’octroyeerde Oostindische Comagnie”, known simply as the “Verenigde Oostindische Compangnie”, or by the acronym “VOC”. According to its “Octrooi”, or Charter, the States-General granted the VOC a monopoly in the Dutch-Asia trade (east of the Cape of Good Hope and west of the Street of Magellan).³

A central committee, the *Heeren XVII* (Gentlemen XVII), governed the VOC and had to formulate policy. The execution of policy was delegated to six “Kamers” or chambers; De Maze in Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Delft, Zeeland in Middelburg, and the “Noordenkwartier” of Holland in Hoorn and Enkhuizen. It is interesting to note, that most of the cities were the Admiralty

³ F.S. Gaastra, *De Geschiedenis van de VOC*, p.20.

Colleges or Dutch naval establishments were seated, also had VOC chambers.⁴ The States-General conferred upon the VOC the sovereign right to maintain troops and garrisons, fit out warships, appoint governors over foreign (Asian) populations, conduct diplomacy and conclude treaties.⁵ Though the VOC appointed and controlled its own military and executive, VOC officials had to swear an oath of allegiance to the States-General.⁶

The creation of the VOC was firstly in the interest of the Dutch State and secondly in the interest of its shareholders. As states were weak in the early modern age (when the VOC was created) and did not always possess all the means to realise their objectives, they looked at private interest to assist them. In this instance private interest and the interest of the state went hand-in-hand. The chartered trading companies were “the greatest example of state encouragement of private enterprise in order to increase its own wealth and power”.⁷ The English East India Company (EEIC), founded in 1600, was the oldest. The French were slow to follow suite, but when they did, it was with vigour. The French Compagnie de Indes was created in 1664, but where the Dutch and British companies were primarily concerned with promoting private wealth, the French company was supervised by the state as an explicit instrument of French power, and for that reason it probably did not flourish in the same way as the others.⁸

The VOC Empire expanded and as a sovereign trading company it supported its trade objectives with diplomacy and inducement, or if necessary with violence and conquest.⁹ A main base or a centralised management organisation in the East soon became necessary and after Jan Pieterszoon Coen conquered Jakarta in 1619, it was renamed Batavia and became the VOC headquarters in the Indies. All VOC possessions now came under the control of its eastern government, the “Gouverneur-Generaal en Raad van Indië” or “De Hoge Indiase Regering” (Governor-General and High Council of the Indies).¹⁰

During the early eighteenth century the EEIC was essentially non-military and not set on territorial control. The British and Dutch were aligned and France was the common enemy. Relations between the VOC and the EEIC were dictated by ‘normal’ commercial rivalry and in terms of trade and shipping, the VOC remained bigger than her European competitors until well into the eighteenth century.¹¹ Perhaps the inherent weaknesses of the VOC were concealed by

⁴ V. Enthoven, ‘Van Steunpilaar tot Blok aan het Been’ in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.38.

⁵ J.I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic. Its Rise, Greatness and Fall, 1477-1806*, p.322.

⁶ G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.2.

⁷ M. Howard, *War in European History*, pp.51-2.

⁸ R. Miller, *The East Indiamen*, p.111; and M. Howard, *War in European History*, pp.51-2.

⁹ K. Zandvliet, ‘Vestingbouw in de Oost’ in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.151.

¹⁰ F.S. Gaastra, *De Geschiedenis van de VOC*, pp.40 and 66; and G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.3.

¹¹ F.S. Gaastra, “Sware continuerende Lasten en groten ommeslagh”. Kosten van de oorlogsvoering van de Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie’ in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.82.

the fact that it faced no serious contenders during this period.¹² The wars of the latter half of the century broke this trend. Now, not only the forces of the different companies but also the various national military and naval forces became involved in the struggle in the East.¹³ The worldwide Anglo-French struggle and involvement of these states had a great impact: The French Company was taken over by the French state in 1769, while the EEIC virtually became a semi-government organisation.¹⁴

The VOC now faced a new era of colonial expansion. As the Seven Years War (1756-63) expanded beyond Europe, parts of India became a French-British war zone in the fight for India. VOC interests in India were threatened and the VOC was not able to defend itself properly against the likes of Britain.¹⁵ As the state supported British interests institutionally and militarily, Britain was now a colonial power in the East. Organisationally four important changes had taken place: Firstly, the days of relatively weak companies were gone and the East became a theatre of war for European competitors. Also, as relations amongst European states became militarised, progressively greater military forces were drawn to the East. Thirdly, the relationship between the companies and their governments changed as they became more closely linked to their governments and in effect subservient to them. Finally, some trading companies became territorial powers, such as the VOC in Java. During the last half of the eighteenth century the VOC's character did not change in the same way as the EEIC did, and it largely maintained its character as a trading company. So, with the rules of the game changing, the VOC did not adapt quick enough.¹⁶

2.2. The VOC, the Cape and the Influence of World Affairs

During the early seventeenth century the volume and scope of the VOC trade increased, making it apparent that they needed a refreshment station on the long route to the East. The Cape of Good Hope was the logic choice and Jan van Reibeeck established a refreshment station at the Cape on 6 April 1652. As a trading empire, the VOC did not wish to have large colonial populations at its trading centres, but the Cape was an exception as a free burgher ("vrijburgher") community settled, mainly to get agriculture going.

During the next century and a half the relationship between the VOC management and the free burghers was always difficult and often tense. Adam Smith stated the "government of

¹² F.S. Gaastra, 'War, Competition and Collaboration ...' in H.V. Bowen, M. Lincoln, and N. Rigby, *The World of the East India Company*, p.56.

¹³ K. Zandvliet, 'Vestingbouw in de Oost' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.171.

¹⁴ M. Arkin, *John Company at the Cape. A History of the Agency under Pringle (1794-1815)* based on a study of the "Cape of Good Hope Factory Records", p.188.

¹⁵ K. Zandvliet, 'Vestingbouw in de Oost' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.170.

¹⁶ G. Teitler, 'De Marine en de Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie. Staatse steun voor een benard bedrijf' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.64.

an exclusive company of merchants is, perhaps, the worst of all governments for any country whatever".¹⁷ This was relevant to the economic development of the Cape under the VOC. The Cape possessed no valuable trade commodities, but was maintained as a halfway station on the sea route to the East. Consequently the VOC monopolised all trade at the Cape, always limiting their commitments to the colony to keep costs down. This resulted in much tension and inhibited the development of the Cape.

The Netherlands was involved in a number of wars in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Hostilities did not extend to the Cape but its defences were often improved during these wars. It was an erratic process, before and during wars defences were improved upon, while afterwards, it often deteriorated. From the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, England (later Britain) became the major competitor of the Dutch and they fought three important maritime conflicts (1652-1654, 1665-1667, and 1672-1674), generally called the Anglo-Dutch Wars. These wars were mainly caused by competitive trading interests in the East Indies and around Europe, as well as the efforts by the English Commonwealth to quell the dominant Dutch commercial shipping with the Navigation Act of 1651 (which stipulated that English goods had to be carried in English ships or ships from the country of origin). In the second war, France fought against England, while in the third war France invaded the Netherlands. The Dutch achieved many naval successes during the Anglo-Dutch Wars, which was the result of maintaining a strong and well-equipped navy.¹⁸ After the war with France, the Dutch vigorously improved the fortifications of the southern cities to create a fortified barrier to an invader. The idea of relying heavily on fortifications to hold back an invader was an essential part of the Dutch defensive thinking,¹⁹ also at the Cape.

In the next two wars between England (Great Britain in 1707) and France, the so-called Nine Years War (1689 to 1697) and the Spanish Succession War (1702-1713), the Netherlands was in coalition with the British. Their combined naval strength was too strong for France, and as France was a strong continental power most of the fighting took place on land. For the Dutch the seventeenth century came to an end in 1713. During the seventeenth century the Dutch and the VOC were particularly strong compared with their maritime competitors and the Dutch were taken seriously as a sea power. It changed in the eighteenth century as their economy declined and their navy was neglected. By 1741, with most of its ships old, the Dutch were not one of the world's major sea powers anymore. Britain, on the other hand, became more powerful because of the growing British trade and colonial empire.

When the Austrian Succession War commenced in 1740, the Dutch Republic was neutral, but after a French invasion in 1744, the Netherlands became involved as an ally of Britain. The war revealed the Dutch naval weakness, as it could not meet all its naval

¹⁷ From Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, quoted in M. Arkin, John Company at the Cape, p.187.

¹⁸ P.J.A.N. Rietbergen (ed), *A Short History of the Netherlands*, pp.101-4.

¹⁹ J. Black, *A Military Revolution?*, pp.53-4.

commitments. In India the French took the initiative. Under the capable leadership of Governor-General Joseph Dupliex, they captured Madras in 1746 (from the British), and with naval support they successfully defended Pondicherry against a British attack in 1748.²⁰ Peace was concluded in 1748 and Madras was restored to Britain. Admiral Boscawen (commander of a strong British naval force despatched to India) replenished at the Cape twice and was impressed with the way his force was supplied at the Cape as it contributed much to his sailors and soldiers being in good health.²¹ Boscawen and the Commodore of the VOC return fleet, Betting, considered attacking Mauritius in March 1748, as the VOC squadron was well equipped and some ships were well armed (the flagship *Slotterdijk* was a 54-gunned ship with 400 men onboard).²² Though the attack never took place, this incident as well as Boscawen's emphasis on the value of the Cape for maintaining military forces, was an indication that the Cape was gaining pertinent military value and could become a springboard for maritime power projection to the East.

By the middle of the eighteenth century an aggressive French-British transoceanic conflict had evolved with the two states fighting for hegemony at sea. Initially fighting was limited to North America and the Caribbean, but soon India became an important arena. Overseas colonies could only be controlled by one means – sea power. The struggle assumed a distinct maritime dimension and from the Mahan perspective the great question these wars determined was that of world history; the power that controlled the sea had control of distant colonies, and implicit to it was wealth and power. The first conflict in this contest was the Seven Years War which was followed by the War of American Independence (1775-83) and the Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon (that commenced in 1792). Now, the demand arose for stations or bases along the extensive and vulnerable sea route to the East; like St Helena, Mauritius and off course the Cape of Good Hope. Such positions were not primarily there for trade, but “for defence and war” and the value of such posts “became chiefly strategic”.²³ The emergent value of the Cape is directly linked to this: as simply a refreshment station along the route it initially had little strategic value and was not an objective during the earlier wars, but with the creation of empires in the East and the escalating conflict between Britain and France, its strategic stature grew.²⁴ It became an important base, a sought after chokepoint of strategic value for the globally minded maritime nations of the time.

When all of this happened on the world stage, the Netherlands was in a downward spiral, its economy was in decline, industry decayed and VOC shares lost much value, which was interpreted as a lack of confidence in the commerce of the Republic.²⁵ Having lost their

²⁰ J. Black, *Warfare in the Eighteenth Century*, p.101.

²¹ G.D. Scholtz, *Suid-Afrika en die Wêreldpolitiek 1652-1952*, p.53.

²² IMH Milo163, *Geschiedenis van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, betreffende een opgave en beschrijving van 13 belangrijke zeeslagen, 1595-1799*, p.53.

²³ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, p.23.

²⁴ G.D. Scholtz, *Suid-Afrika en die Wêreldpolitiek 1652-1952*, pp.45-7.

²⁵ J.I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, p.1079.

former prominence as a maritime power, the Dutch tried to stay neutral, but when they became involved in war (in 1780) it had a dramatic impact as they could not hold their own and the security of their establishments became dependent on French assistance.²⁶

2.3 Military and Maritime VOC and its Interaction with the Dutch State

Due to its sovereign right in Asia (conferred upon it by the States-General) the VOC controlled Dutch commerce and diplomacy in Asia and could maintain garrisons and fleets.²⁷ The VOC created a trading empire in the early seventeenth century and maintained it for nearly two centuries with surprisingly little military means. But the fact that the application of military power at sea and on land was an essential and constant part of its existence, should never be taken out of consideration.²⁸ The VOC was also a military organisation, known as the “krijgsheer in Azië”. Most of its personnel ashore in Asia were military, while its heavily armed ships did not only trade, but also assisted with extending and defending its economic and military interests.²⁹ By 1783 the military component of the VOC was 10 031, from a total of 18 452. In addition, the VOC was in many ways an international organisation. About 40% of the sailors and 60% of the soldiers that sailed with the VOC were of foreign stock. These percentages rose and by 1770 it might have been as much as 80% of the soldiers and 50% of the sailors.³⁰

Profit was the VOC's objective and it relied on power to make that possible. While enlightened theorists of the day, such as Hugo de Groot, proposed an open seas approach, in its domain the VOC aimed at excluding its opponents, controlling the trade routes and monopolising important products. There was always war somewhere in the commercial empire of the VOC and trade was dictated by war and coercion. It is obvious; the VOC was a truly militarised organisation, as Raben poignantly pointed out: “De VOC was een door en door gemilitariseerde organisatie”.³¹ This was the nature of trade competition in the East, after the VOC had her era of glory she would suffer at the hands of the British.

Military power was always balanced against profit, too much would be too expensive, while too little could make the risk too big. Military expenditure was always a very important component of the VOC expenses and according to Gaastra, between 1613 and 1792 around

²⁶ J. Black, *Warfare in the Eighteenth Century*, p.96.

²⁷ J.I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, p.946.

²⁸ D. De Jong, *Het Krijgswezen onder de Oostindische Compagnie*, pp.7-8.

²⁹ V. Enthoven, 'Van Steunpilaar tot Blok aan het Been' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.35.

³⁰ M.L. Barend-van Haften, *Op Reis met de VOC*, p.16; and F.S. Gaastra, *De Geschiedenis van de VOC*, pp.81 and 87.

³¹ R. Raben, 'Het Aziatisch Legioen. Huurlingen, Bondgenoten en Reservisten in het Geweer voor de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.181.

30% of its cost was military. But with the decline of the VOC, it became increasingly difficult to maintain its military capability on acceptable levels.³²

The military power of the VOC was essential maritime in character. Due to the immense worth of its maritime communications, the maritime network of the VOC was dependant on a series of fortified and garrisoned strategic strongpoints or bases for defence against European or indigenous enemies. The main purpose of bases was therefore maritime, and they had to be able to withstand direct attack by European enemies.³³

2.3.1. The VOC and the Dutch State: Military Interaction

Military and naval interaction between the VOC and the Dutch Republic varied, but was limited for most of the VOC history. Only during the last decade of its existence did the State support the VOC militarily in the Indies. Contact with the army was very little. Officers often served in the army before joining the VOC, but the know-how of officers that served in the more technical branches, like engineering and artillery, was specifically important. At the Cape the interaction was perhaps closer than at other establishments and during the eighteenth century four of the ten VOC Governors were professional military men (Van Assenburg, De Chavonnes, Noodt and Van de Graaff), while Commissioner-General Frijkenius was a naval officer.³⁴ Many of the engineering and artillery officers that did splendid work at the Cape, such as Gilquin, were formally in the service of the Dutch State.

Interaction with the navy was closer. In European waters the VOC and the Republic worked together in two ways: During wars (specifically in the seventeenth century) the VOC often supported the State with ships, men and equipment. On the other hand, the Republic also assisted to the VOC by providing escorts for the departing and, more essentially, the richly laden returning convoys. The VOC paid on a yearly basis for a convoy escort of four frigates. These ships were very seldom in the south Atlantic and never to the east of the Cape of Good Hope.³⁵ The naval squadrons despatched to the Indies during the last decade of the VOC, was not part of the normal convoy arrangement. As a rule homeward bound VOC ships sailed in fleets and were met by VOC cruisers and warships in the North Sea or at the entrance to the Channel. In troubled times a Secret Committee of the *Heeren XVII* determined the meeting place well in advance and the information was despatch to the Cape to be handed to the

³² F.S. Gaastra, "Sware continuerende Lasten ..." G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, pp.82 and 88.

³³ K. Zandvliet, 'Vestingbouw in de Oost' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, pp.151 and 167.

³⁴ G. Schutte, 'Kompanjie en Koloniste aan die Kaap' in H. Giliomee and R. Elphick, *'n Samelewing in Wording: Suid-Afrika 1652-1840*, pp.302-3.

³⁵ E.S. van Eyck van Heslinga, 'A Competitive Ally. The Delicate Balance of Naval Alliance and Maritime Competition between Britain and the Dutch Republic, 1674-1795' in G.J.A. Raven and N.A.M. Rodger (eds), *Navies and Armies. The Anglo-Dutch Relationship in War and Peace 1688-*

commanders of the returning ships.³⁶ Dutch naval officers often served the VOC in peacetime, as officers and captains at sea or ashore in administrative and logistic posts such as *Equipagemeester* (responsible for maintaining and equipping ships, often translated as Superintendent of Shipping). Prominent naval officers that served VOC were Staring (*Equipagemeester* at the Cape), Van Braam, Frijkenius and Stavorinus.

2.3.2. The Maritime Organisation of the VOC

Ships were essential tools in the economic system of the VOC as they carried the incredibly rich trade, people and equipment. They also acted as military platforms and assisted with both acquiring new territories and defending VOC property. For most of its history, the VOC was capable of maintaining its authority and enforcing its power by relying on its own means.³⁷

East Indiamen of the late eighteenth century was large vessels, nearly twice the size of the average merchantmen (about 46 metres long, displacing 800 tons or more and carrying about 1000 tons of cargo). Though beautiful, these vessels sailed notoriously poor due to the bluff bow and deep rounded bottom (for cargo carrying). With a high superstructure they made much leeway and could not sail too close to the wind. They averaged about four knots, which was close to half the speed of a ship of the line.³⁸ In the late eighteenth century the VOC improved the design of their East Indiamen by doing away with the so-called "kulkdekschepen" (forward of the main mast, between the quarterdeck and the forecastle, the ship had a low central deck) and introducing a so-called "driedekker" by adding a third deck running from stem to stern. These ships had less trouble with water washing over the centre of the ship in heavy weather.

Shipping with the East Indies doubled after 1700 and the VOC was the biggest employer in Netherlands.³⁹ Both outbound and homebound VOC ships sailed in convoys. Outbound convoys left the Netherlands between September and April, while homebound convoys usually departed from Batavia at the end of the year or a month or two later. On average it took three to four months to sail between the Netherlands and the Cape, while a voyage between the Cape and Asia took about 70 to 85 days. Ships sailing to Europe departed from the Cape between December and May. The VOC initially planned for its ships to not stay at the Cape for more than two weeks, but as ships were supplied and repaired, and their sick had to recuperate, the

1988, p.3; and G. Teitler, 'De Marine en de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.59.

³⁶ J.R. Bruijn et al, *Dutch-Asiatic shipping*, I, p.36.

³⁷ G. Teitler, 'De Marine en de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.59.

³⁸ R. Miller, *The East Indiamen*, p.125.

³⁹ F.J.A. Broeze, J.R. Bruijn and F.S. Gaastra, *Maritieme Geschiedenis der Nederlanden. Achttiende eeuw en eerste helft negentiende eeuw*, Volume III, p.150.

average stay at the Cape became roughly four weeks.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the harsh climate of the Indies and the severe weather around the Cape caused much damage to ships and their rigging. As a result ships were constantly repaired and the VOC had to sustain workshops, shipwrights, equipment and a maintenance organisation in the East and at the Cape.

An innovation the Dutch introduced to navigation in the Indian Ocean in the early seventeenth century was for their outbound East Indiamen to sail via the “roaring forties” route. From the Cape, ships steered due east in a latitude of between 36° and 42° South to pick-up the trade winds, until they had to steer due north for the Strait of Sunda.⁴¹ The Standing Orders the VOC issued to its captains contained detail on the sea conditions around the Cape, prevailing winds, instructions on the use of Table Bay, navigating into Saldanha Bay, the situation in Hout Bay and sailing directions for entering False Bay and anchoring in Simon’s Bay.⁴² VOC ships usually also had soldiers onboard and their crews were not only responsible for handling the ship and its cargo, but they also had to be able to serve the guns onboard and fight the ship if necessary.⁴³ The disciplinary codes and the punishments for offences the VOC applied on its ships were stipulated by the States-General.

VOC ships were always armed, mainly to be able to defend themselves against pirates and privateers. In times of trouble or with international tension building, the *Heeren XVII* instructed the Cape and other establishments to ensure that its ships were properly armed and capable to defend themselves.⁴⁴ Though some ships carried a large number of guns, on paper even more than the average frigate of the day, these were normally light guns, smaller in calibre to those on warships, which implied that East Indiamen did not possess the firepower and combat ability analogous with warships. For example, at the beginning of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War the biggest VOC ships (46 metre or 150 foot class) had to be armed with fourteen 18-pounders, 22 12-pounders, two 8-pounders, eight 6-pounders and smaller armament.⁴⁵ When some of the bigger VOC ships were specially equipped for war, their main armament included only four 32-pounders, 24 8-pounders and 32 4-pounders and smaller guns⁴⁶ – not comparable to the average ship of the line with at least 64 or more heavy guns.

⁴⁰ E.M. Jacobs, *Varen om Peper en Thee. Korte Geschiedenis van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, pp.57-8; and J.R. Bruijn et al, *Dutch-Asiatic shipping*, I, pp.67-70 and 85.

⁴¹ C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600-1800*, p.197.

⁴² Nationaal Archief Nederland (hereafter NAN) VOC11222, Concept Instructie voor de opperhoofde van de Scheepen der generale Neederlandsche geotroijeerde Oost Indische Comp zoo van hier na Indien gaande als van daar herwaarts komende en de Tafelbaaij aan Cabo de Goede Hoop willende aandoen (no date, probably middle eighteenth century).

⁴³ G.C. Arkenbout and A.A. Arkenbout, *Arie Pietersz en Jacobus Ariesz Arkenbout, 1721-1834*, pp.5-7.

⁴⁴ K.M. Jeffreys (ed), *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1778*, Inkomende Brieven, *Heeren XVII* – Governor-General and Council of India, 18/12/1777, pp.233-4.

⁴⁵ NAN VOC4538, Geheim Committ’e aan den Gouverneur Generaal en de Raaden van Indien, 23/8/1781.

⁴⁶ NAN VOC4960, Memorie van A.A. Titsingh, equipagemeester aan de bewindhebbers van de kamer Amsterdam over de bewapening van de schepen, 29/1/1781.

While the VOC was considered a noteworthy naval power in its early days, by the middle of the eighteenth century its naval power was even in a more deplorable state than its land forces. When well-armed British warships appeared in the East at the time, it emphasised the inadequacies of the VOC as they had no warships comparable to the British warships. Also many VOC forts did not have sufficient heavy artillery (the 36-pounders of the day) for defence against warships. The VOC was incapable to stand its ground in naval and military terms against a strong European contender like Britain.⁴⁷

Governor-General Van Imhoff was well aware of the problems and regarded quality ships and competent seagoing officers to sail and fight them, as very important. He emphasised the necessity of scientific and theoretical schooling for seagoing personnel of the VOC and created a naval school in Batavia (it closed in 1755). The old designations “Schipper” (Skipper), “Opperstuurman” (Master Coxswain) and “Stuurman” (Coxswain) were replaced by the titles Captain and Lieutenant to give greater honour to these appointments.⁴⁸ The rank of the Captain or Skipper on VOC ships was equal to the military rank of Lieutenant and not to the naval rank Captain, which was the equivalent of Colonel.

On outbound voyages VOC ships acted as passenger carriers and troopships that transported soldiers, officials and their families to the Indies. The result was that ships often had as much as 300 people onboard. Officers and important passengers had better living conditions than the sailors and soldiers, who (on crowded ships) would have about 300 square meters deck space for about 200 sailors and soldiers.⁴⁹ The cramped conditions and poor nutrition resulted in high casualty rates which averaged 9,5% on outbound voyages and 6% on return voyages. If infectious diseases were onboard, casualty rates obviously soared.

At its highpoint in the 1720's, the VOC despatched 382 ships to Asia, while 319 returned. It progressively became less, and between 1750 and 1790 an average of about 292 ships were despatched to Asia per decade with about 237 returning.⁵⁰ During its existence the VOC undertook as much as 4700 voyages to Asia and carried about one million people to the East. Only about a third of them returned on the approximately 3300 voyages back to the Netherlands. The rest were not all fatalities, as many served the VOC for long periods or settled in the East or at the Cape.⁵¹

Building and running a large fleet required special organisational skills, which the VOC certainly had. This efficient administration functioned right to the end of the VOC, but during its last decades it lacked the fluidity it formerly had. By 1780 it no longer had a sufficient and well armed shipping force, and the Dutch State was called upon for assistance.⁵²

⁴⁷ D. De Jong, *Het Krijgswezen onder de Oostindische Compagnie*, p.160.

⁴⁸ D. De Jong, *Het Krijgswezen onder de Oostindische Compagnie*, pp.169-70.

⁴⁹ A.E. Leuftink, *Harde Heelmeesters. Zeelieden en hun Dokters in de 18e Eeuw*, pp.56-7.

⁵⁰ F.S. Gaastra, *De Geschiedenis van de VOC*, p.115.

⁵¹ M.L. Barend-van Haeften, *Op Reis met de VOC. De openhartige dagboeken van de zusters Lammers en Swellengrebel*, p.15.

⁵² J.R. Bruijn et al, *Dutch-Asiatic shipping in the 17th and 18th centuries*, Volume I, p.27.

2.3.3. Dutch Naval Organisation

The Dutch naval establishment had a complex organisation. Since the end of the Middle Ages states in Western Europe created Admiralty Boards or Navy Councils to manage their naval function. In 1597 the States-General established five Admiralty Colleges in its coastal provinces – the Maas (Rotterdam), Amsterdam, the Noordenkwartier van Holland (Hoorn and Enkhuizen), Zeeland (Middelburg) and Friesland (Harlingen).⁵³ These Admiralties had to function in co-operation with the States-General and the provincial governments and received funds from both, which complicated naval administration.⁵⁴ With no centralised policy and planning capacity, naval administration became a negotiation process and as each Admiralty appointed officers, recruited crews, build warships, maintained arsenals and stores, it effectively meant that the Republic had five navies.⁵⁵ The only real consolidating function was that of the Stadtholder who as Admiral-General held the highest executive function.⁵⁶ By comparison the British integrated their seafaring experience and knowledge of naval administration in a centralised policy making and guiding instrument, the Admiralty Board.⁵⁷

The seventeenth century was the glory days of the Dutch Navy (“s’lands oorlogsvloot”) with competent seamen winning great naval victories. During the eighteenth century it declined as a fighting force, while at the same time the VOC also lost its prowess at sea. In the three decades following 1748, Dutch naval operations were routine affairs. A regular convoy service was organised for the merchant marine, while Dutch relations with the states of the Barbary Coast, with its pirates or corsairs, remained fluid. During the war with Algiers (1755-59) and Morocco (1774-70) some Dutch naval vessels operated in the region to protect trade. During the Seven Years War (1756-63), as Dutch merchantmen often fell pray to British privateers, Dutch naval vessels escorted the convoys through the North Atlantic and the English Channel.⁵⁸ Some of these convoys were quite big, but often only a small portion of them (a third or a quarter) were VOC ships. For example, only eight of the 40 ships in the convoy the warship ‘t *Loo* escorted through the English Channel in 1756, were East Indiamen.⁵⁹

The great warships were with little doubt the most powerful, awesome and expensive single engines of war the period produced. Three masted warships were divided into six rates or classes, depending on their size, armament and combat capability. The ships of the line

⁵³ E.S. van Eyck van Heslinga, ‘A Competitive Ally ...’ in G.J.A. Raven and N.A.M. Rodger (eds), *Navies and Armies*, p.2.

⁵⁴ V. Enthoven, ‘Van Steunpilaar tot Blok aan het Been’ in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.37.

⁵⁵ J.I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, pp.295-6.

⁵⁶ S.J. Fokema Andreae, *De Nederlandse Staat onder de Republiek*, pp.26-7.

⁵⁷ J. R. Bruijn, *The Dutch Navy of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, p.217.

⁵⁸ NAN 1.01.50 – 132. Stukken betreffende de verhouding van de Republiek en Engeland ter zee en de bescherming van Nederlandse koopvaardijsschepen tegen Engelse kapers, 1756-59, 1778.

were designed to sail in the line of battle and fight in big fleet engagements. They were first to third-raters, armed with 64 to more than 100 guns (32-pounders to 12-pounders) on two or three gun decks. A fourth-rater was armed with 50 to 56 guns, a fifth-rater or frigate had between 24 and 40 guns, while a sixth-rater, a sloop or corvette, usually carried less than 20 guns. Ships from the last three classes acted as guard ships in the colonies, performed duties as convoy escorts, commerce raiders, troopships and storeships.⁶⁰ In addition, navies had a variety of smaller two or single masted vessels known as brigs and cutters, that were often equipped for specialised roles such as bomb vessels. Frigates, known as the 'eyes of the fleet', were fast and far-reaching scouts, nimble reconnaissance vessels, good escorts and ideal for commerce raiding. From the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, Britain and France deployed ships of the line (mostly third-raters) in the Indian Ocean and they became regular visitors at the Cape of Good Hope. The fleets that attacked or defended the Cape always included ships of the line.

As the awesome firepower of the ship of the line was in its broadsides, naval tactics followed a formalist pattern during the eighteenth century. Tactics dictated that the opposing ships of the line take their positions in a line ahead formation, after which massive artillery firefights took place with ships pouring their broadsides into the enemy line. Naval encounters often proved strategically advantageous, but until a means was found to regain tactical concentration by breaking the enemy's line and destroying his fleet, they were seldom tactically decisive. These were the tactical issues naval commanders of the time grappled with.

After the Seven Years War, with the Dutch Republic in decline, its navy was no more in the demanding position of a century earlier. With fewer ships, and old obsolescent vessels at that, it was clear by the 1770's that a naval upgrade programme was an urgent requirement. Unfortunately though, due to differences of opinion between the various provinces and a lack of will to force a decision from the Stadtholder, the navy did not receive the attention it deserved.⁶¹ It was an unprepared and decrepit Dutch Navy that had to face the massive challenges of the late eighteenth century.

2.3.4. The VOC Military System

The VOC contributed in exporting the Western military revolution. The military traditions in the VOC were taken over from the *Staatse Leger* of the Dutch Republic, which emerged successfully from the long independence war against the Spanish in the early years of the VOC.⁶² Typically of a trading organisation, the VOC placed very little emphasis on military affairs after its initial conquests. By the middle of the eighteenth century its military system was

⁵⁹ NAN De Jong XL28, Journaal gehouden aanboord van 's Lands oorlogship 't Loo gedurende het jaaren 1756 tot en met het jaar 1760.

⁶⁰ A.B.C. Whipple, *Fighting Sail*, p.14.

⁶¹ J.I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, pp.1094-5.

⁶² P.M. Grobbelaar, *Die Ontstaan van 'n Westerse Militêre Tradisie aan die Kaap tot 1795*, p.72.

in a poor state and its fortifications neglected. The Governor-General of the Indies, Gustav Willem Baron Van Imhoff, reorganised the military system of the VOC and brought it in line with the Western military organisation of the period. To understand the VOC military system, an appreciation of the European military system of the time, specifically in terms of organisation, character, tactics and weapons, is essential. Moreover, the military system that expanded, defended and protected the VOC Empire was in essence European.⁶³

During the eighteenth century states relied heavily on mercenary recruitment to lessen the impact of war on their own labour force and economy. Armies consisted of fulltime professional soldiers with both officers and men serving for a number of years. They had to adhere to a strict code of conduct or a set of rules, the breaking of which could result in severe punishment. They wore uniforms, for most stayed in special military barracks. As professional soldiers they were part of a military organisation that to a great extent had persisted to the present day.⁶⁴ The officer's cadre were more aristocratic and closely linked to the ruler or government of the day, but more of the officers in the technical branches (the artillery and engineering) came from the middle class.⁶⁵ Soldiers came from the peasants, farm labourers, labourers, and even from the marginalised and unwanted, such as petty criminals, bankrupts and prisoners. Soldiers often joined to get away, because they had no other option, or were even volunteered by their communities. This made the armies of the time different from the part-time militias.⁶⁶

In accordance with practices of the day, the VOC military force was a mercenary force with many of their men soldiering because they often had no other outcome. Some were poor and unemployed, were fleeing justice or were fortune hunters. As they generally had little expertise, training and experience, VOC local governments often complained about the useless quality of the soldiers they had received. The High Council in India referring to them in 1652 as "soo veel slecht ende onervaren volck...", while the Governor of Ceylon complained a century later that many had never handled a musket before.⁶⁷ The soldiers were often considered the dregs of European society "... uitschot der Europeërs zyn, dat het slechte lieden zyn, genoodzaakt om Europa te verlaaten en naar Azië te vertrekken...".⁶⁸

The large number of foreigners (especially Germans) amongst the VOC sailors and specifically in the ranks of the soldiers is in line with the military history of the United Provinces. Many foreign mercenaries or even whole foreign regiments were constantly in Dutch service.

⁶³ D. De long, *Het Krijgswezen onder de Oostindische Compagnie*, pp.10-1.

⁶⁴ P. Browning, *The Changing Nature of Warfare*, pp.5-7.

⁶⁵ H. Strachan, *European Armies and the Conduct of War*, p.9; and J. Black, *A Military Revolution?*, pp.78-9.

⁶⁶ P. Browning, *The Changing Nature of Warfare*, pp.5-7.

⁶⁷ R. Raben, 'Het Aziatisch Legioen' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, pp.182-3.

⁶⁸ Anonymous, *Nederlandsch Afrika; of historish en staatkundig Tafereel van den oorsprongelyken staat der Volksplantinge aan de Kaap de Goede Hoop, vergeleeken met den tegenwoordigen*

Though the ratio of Dutch officers were higher than amongst the rank and file, officers of other nationalities were common. Many officers, whether Dutch or not, were of noble blood. However, the status of the officer was never as high in the Netherlands as in most other European countries and it even declined somewhat in the eighteenth century.⁶⁹

Batavia was the military Headquarters of the VOC. Throughout its history the VOC experienced difficulties in maintaining its military organisation as a shortage of cash and resolve to meet the military requirements, impacted negatively. Though soldiers were constantly despatched from Europe, it never had enough soldiers.⁷⁰ Not only were they of poor quality, but the attrition rate from death, disease and desertion was high. As many soldiers were of poor health to start of with, the often difficult voyage, the unhygienic conditions in cities like Batavia and the harsh climate of the Indies claimed its toll. For example, the 10324 infantrymen and 928 artillerymen on the 1777 Muster Role of Batavia shrank to 8566 in three years, while between 1780 and 1790, 4409 European soldiers died in Batavia. Troop replacement also resulted in much loss: Of the 7543 men departing from the Netherlands on 26 ships in 1772, 1959 died before they reached the Cape. About 829 were left behind at the Cape (including the sick and deserters) and 4755 eventually reached Batavia. With European soldiers in short supply, the VOC placed more reliance on indigenously raised troops.⁷¹

To provide the VOC with soldiers and sailors, a class of crimps, known as *zielverkoopers* (literally soul sellers) emerged in Amsterdam and other Dutch ports. They offered the penniless and unemployed board and lodging until such time as men were recruited for the next India fleet. In return the men had to sign a *transportbrief* (really an IOU) for the accommodation and subsistence cost the *zielverkooper* had incurred, which then were repaid through monthly deductions from the recruit's pay. While waiting for enlistment their living conditions were dismal and men were huddled together, often in small cellars, attics or garrets, with little light and ventilation, poor food and bad sanitary arrangements. Such men did not have a fair chance of surviving a harrowing voyage or resisting disease and infection.⁷²

The service period for sailors and soldiers were five years. After arriving at the Cape, or their posting, they received a new uniform (deducted from their pay) and they had to provide their own bedding, blankets, furniture and utensils such as kettles. Soldiers received very few salary increases and their only reward were promotion to a non-commissioned officer (NCO) or to eventually become an officer.⁷³ Soldiers and sailors serving with the VOC had a harsh live

staat dier Volkplantinge, in't licht gegeven naar het Handschrift van een' wel onderricht Opmerker, 1783, p.37.

⁶⁹ C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire*, pp.80-1.

⁷⁰ Cape Archives Repository (hereafter CA) C2377, Extract uijt de Generale Resolutiën des Casteel Batavia, 29/4/1765, Militairen vide ook met betrekking tot de naar Ceylon gaanden bodems, p.77.

⁷¹ D. De long, *Het Krijgswezen onder de Oostindische Compagnie*, p.156.

⁷² C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire*, pp.81-2.

⁷³ Brenthurst Library (hereafter BL) MS061/1, J. Barrow, *Sketches of the Political and Commercial History of the Cape of Good Hope, Part 4, Military Establishment of the Cape of Good Hope, 1796, pp.193-4.*

and were subjected to severe punishment. Floggings occurred and men could be injured for life on the “wooden horse” or through other savage punishments.

Since the early eighteenth century European infantry standardised on the flintlock musket and the socket bayonet. Tactics of the period focussed on the deployment of infantry in close but thin linear formations, firing in volleys (rather than individually aimed shots) to concentrate firepower and produce the most effect. Despite being armed with bayonets and the potential it provided for shock action, hand-to-hand fighting on the battlefield was rare as most casualties were caused by shot. As the accuracy, rate of fire and the range of muskets were limited (muskets had a maximum effective range of about 200 metres and well-drilled troops fired two rounds a minute) most engagements took place at close range and much depended on the ability of the infantry to act in unison on the battlefield. Hence training and drill was crucial to maintain discipline and a rapid rate of fire.⁷⁴

On the battlefield linear infantry was flanked by cavalry units while field artillery was deployed between the infantry regiments to provide cover for their deployment. The battlefield role of artillery became more important as the eighteenth century progressed as it could fire at the massed infantry formations or deliver counter-battery fire (fire at the artillery of the other side).⁷⁵ Cavalry (armed with lances, swords and pistols) became less important during the eighteenth century due to the emphasis on firepower and the high cost of good cavalry. Cavalry mostly fought against other cavalry, but as infantry was vulnerable to cavalry attacks in the flanks and rear, cavalry was still important in some victories.⁷⁶ Cavalry and mounted infantry (dragoons armed with carbines and swords) also provided strategic mobility over long distances and were very important for reconnaissance, scouting, raiding and in hot pursuit operations. In warfare outside Europe, cavalry maintained its worth for a long time to come. The unique attributes of the Cape, its difficult terrain, vast coastline and great expanses, made cavalry invaluable.

Eighteenth century states and rulers were anxious to conserve their resources, and were weary of long and expensive wars that could disrupt economies and cause a loss of trade. Limited warfare was therefore at the order of the day. European wars at the time were seldom decided by large armies fighting each other in the field and often campaigns ended after sieges or when cities and fortifications were taken. If towns were well-fortified and provisioned, an attacking enemy could do little but attack, fire and wait. In the Dutch approach to defence, much emphasis was placed on fortified towns and cities. As a result, the VOC created large fortifications to protect its interest⁷⁷ and though the military force of the VOC was relatively

⁷⁴ J. Black, ‘The Military Revolution II. Eighteenth-Century War’ in C. Townshend (ed), *The Oxford History of Modern War*, p.47.

⁷⁵ P. Browning, *The Changing Nature of Warfare*, pp.7-9.

⁷⁶ H. Strachan, *European Armies and the Conduct of War*, pp.15-6; and J. Black, ‘The Military Revolution II’ in C. Townshend (ed), *The Oxford History of Modern War*, p.47.

⁷⁷ R. Raben, ‘Het Aziatisch Legioen’ in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.184.

constant in the eighteenth century, the technical corps (artillery and engineers) grew steadily: It was 393 in 1710, 710 in 1753, 858 in 1780 and 982 in 1789. This indicated that the VOC was strategically on the defensive and felt itself “besieged” by growing European competition.

Armies placed high demands on logistics and cash, as they had to be quartered and trained and were constantly in need of arms, ammunition, supplies and equipment. The soldier on duty on the rampart was only part of the responsibility of running a military establishment and usually a series of magazines (depots or warehouses) were maintained to support campaigning armies. Due to the problems the VOC encountered with maintaining its military system the Cape Garrison experienced many logistic problems during the second half of the eighteenth century and Colonel Gordon constantly complained about items such as tents, substandard and outdated muskets, insufficient ammunition and the lack of proper equipment.⁷⁸

Van Imhoff's objective in reforming the VOC military system was to bring it in line with common practices, to create cohesion amongst the various spread-out military establishments and to improve order, discipline, training and the general military bearing. The VOC required more and better quality officers and the States-General were asked for assistance, with the result that Van Imhoff was accompanied by a Colonel, four Lieutenant-Colonels and nineteen infantry, cavalry and artillery officers. Van Imhoff centralised the military command in Batavia by placing a Colonel (formally a Major) with the title Brigadier at its head. The cavalry now consisted of a lifeguard and hussars (three companies) and four dragoons companies (the VOC had no regular cavalry at the Cape at this stage). The battalion became the tactical unit of the infantry and the VOC military were organised into six battalions, with each battalion divided into six companies. Every battalion had a Colonel, Lieutenant-colonel, Major and three Captains (all serving as Company Commanders) while each company also had a Lieutenant and two Ensigns. Much emphasis was placed on regular training and exercise. The artillery comprised eight companies of 50 men each, while Van Imhoff emphasised the lack of well-trained engineers and artillerists to the *Heeren XVII*.⁷⁹ The military structure now had a conceptual strength of 13802 men and though it was a paper exercise, with many soldiers stationed at various VOC posts, the military system was tactically and organisationally European.⁸⁰

To restrain high costs and due to a shortage of European soldiers, the British and French relied heavily on indigenous troops. It would have been impossible to capture and garrison their empires without locally recruited troops.⁸¹ The VOC was in the same position and could not achieve its objectives without utilising local military assistance. They relied on three types of Asiatic soldiers: Firstly regular soldiers recruited into the VOC, then troops of Asian allies and thirdly troops mobilised for specific campaigns. On Ceylon the VOC had many

⁷⁸ C174, Resolutiën, 18/5/1787, pp.436-77, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁷⁹ K. Zandvliet, 'Vestingbouw in de Oost' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.155.

⁸⁰ D. De long, *Het Krijgswezen onder de Oostindische Compagnie*, pp.149-52.

sipahis (sepoys) or Indian soldiers, in its service. They were mostly recruited during the big war with the Kingdom of Kandy (1761-65), who supported a revolt against the VOC on Ceylon. The campaigns against Kandy were the biggest the VOC conducted in the eighteenth century and as it could not amass enough troops on Ceylon, local troops were recruited. Of the 11468 troops on Ceylon in April 1765, 3030 were Asian and 3418 *sipahis*. They received firearms and were trained in the western way of war, but were commanded by European officers. At the time, it was thought that the military competence of the *sipahis* were lacking. After the treaty with Kandy, in 1765, most of the foreign troops disappeared.⁸²

Due to a shortage of European soldiers the percentage Asian soldiers steadily increased during the late eighteenth century: By 1751, half the garrison on Ceylon were European, while in 1788, only 481 soldiers of the 1901 strong garrison on Malabar were European. In 1794, 24 of the 50 companies in Batavia were Asian or *sipahis*.⁸³ Though the situation was somewhat different at the Cape, a Khoi regiment was recruited in the early 1780's and again a decade later, while the burger militia (part time military) was regarded as crucial to the defence of the Cape.

The territorial expansion of the VOC and the military operations it conducted was in the interest of its trade and not aimed at building a great colonial empire. Militarily the VOC was "a giant on clay feet" by the late eighteenth century. As the French-British power struggle evolved, the only real option the VOC had, was to entrench itself in three strategic strong-points, the Cape of Good Hope, Ceylon and Java (Batavia). In the end only Java survived the British expansion.⁸⁴

3. THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

From 1652 onwards VOC fleets called at the Cape for fresh provisions and to give the sick an opportunity to recuperate. The Cape is often referred to as a half-way house between the Europe and Asia or a "tavern of two seas", as it is at the junction between the Indian and the Atlantic Oceans and was a crucial refreshment station for ships.⁸⁵ Initially it was mostly Dutch ships that called at the Cape, but by the middle of the eighteenth century foreign ships (specifically British) calling at the Cape increased and after 1772 most of the ships at anchor would often be foreign.

⁸¹ D. Porch, 'Imperial Wars. From the Seven Years War to the First World War' in Townshend, C. (ed), *The Oxford History of Modern War*, pp.97 and 108.

⁸² R. Raben, 'Het Aziatisch Legioen' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, pp.181, 191 and 199-200.

⁸³ R. Raben, 'Het Aziatisch Legioen' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p. 200.

⁸⁴ K. Zandvliet, 'Vestingbouw in de Oost' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, pp.152 and 156.

⁸⁵ C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire*, pp.198 and 242.

Table Bay was the main anchorage at the Cape, and Cape Town the political and economic centre. Table Bay, open to the north, had a large and commodious anchorage that was safe for ships during the summer with its prevailing southerly winds. An important shortcoming was its unsuitability as a winter anchorage, with its often severe north-westerly gales. Many richly laden VOC ships perished at the Cape, often with all hands, and it was clear that an alternative arrangement had to be made. The eastern and northern shore of False Bay gave no protection to shipping, but its western shore provided good protection against the winter winds and Simon's Bay could even shelter a small number of ships in summer. Consequently, the VOC took possession of it in 1671. From time to time ships anchored in False Bay during winter, but it was difficult to provision them. After a few ferocious storms wreaked havoc with shipping in Table Bay, the *Heeren XVII* approved the establishment of a post to provision ships in Simon's Bay in 1742. Work on its buildings commenced in 1743 and after a plan to build a breakwater in Table Bay was considered too expensive in 1751, Simon's Bay became a permanent outpost of the VOC. By 1753 all ships had to use Simon's Bay from middle May to middle August⁸⁶ and warehouses were built, a stone pier made and a large hospital erected. By the 1760's the Standing Orders issued to VOC captains informed them on the sea and coastal conditions around the Cape and indicated how to make the best use of prevailing winds and miss the worst storms. Captains were sternly ordered not to be at anchor in Table Bay between middle May and middle August – those that did, could be fined with three months' salary.⁸⁷ In 1792 the *Heeren XVII* ordered its ships to anchor in Simon's Bay from 10 April to 1 September. Also, in line with the VOC approach, anchorages had to be secure and were usually covered by coastal fortifications. This was the case in Table Bay, but not in Simon's Bay.

Despite the valuable role of the Cape as a refreshment station, the VOC still suffered many fatalities at sea. Stavorinus indicated that out of a total of 5971 souls onboard the 27 VOC ships that sailed to the East in 1768-9, 959 (about one in six) died during the voyage. Another reminder of the harsh realities of shipping at the time and the value of the Cape is the story of the VOC ship *De Naarstigheid* (published in 1761). In a terrible storm along the East Coast of Africa, *De Naarstigheid* lost her masts and rigging. The crew made a jury-rig, but progress was slow and with many sick crewmembers they suffered up to three fatalities a day until they managed to reach the Cape.⁸⁸ Some ships would barely reach the Cape having too few able crewmembers left to anchor, or others, like the *Goude Bijs* and *Huis te Vlotter* suffered so many fatalities, that the ships were abandoned in St Helena Bay.⁸⁹ Many fascinating real-life stories abound ...

⁸⁶ D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, pp.296, 301 and 303-4.

⁸⁷ NAN VOC4826, Zeilaas-Ordre van Batavia over Cabo de Bona Esperance naar het Patria in October en November, 25/8/1769.

⁸⁸ J. Francken, *Rampspoedige Reize van Het O.I. Schip De Naarstigheid...*, pp.43-50.

⁸⁹ D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, p.469.

When VOC ships arrived at the Cape, the *Equipagemeester* had to tend to them, make sure they receive provisions and assist with repairs. The Cape had no dockyard for major repairs, but a large number of shipwrights and sailors worked under the direction of the *Equipagemeester*. If ships were in too a poor condition to continue, they were unloaded and repaired or scrapped.⁹⁰ The *Equipagemeester* was in charge of the anchorage and had executive authority on all shipping matters, which implied repair and maintenance tasks, while he managed the VOC yard⁹¹ with its workshops, warehouses and magazines. All the sailors and personnel at the yard were under his command and in an emergency they had to man the artillery on a number of the fortifications.⁹²

The Cape was never a money-spinner to the VOC; in fact it was quite the opposite. Between 1757 and 1777 the cost of maintaining the Cape for a year was in the vicinity of f450 000 while its income was not more than f200 000⁹³ – a deficit of up to f300 000. On average more than fifty ships visited the Cape each year, but the VOC did not consider the Cape as profitable. In the management guidelines issued in 1777, it was stated that an annual deficit of f234 000 for the Cape was quite acceptable. Yet, when the target was not achieved and more than fifty ships (with each having at least 200 men staying for about a month) visited the Cape in a specific year, the cost was not considered unwarranted.⁹⁴ An aspect which is difficult to judge and not within parameters of this study; is what the cost in men and material would have been if the VOC had to refresh at a foreign port.

The highest political and military authority at the Cape was the Governor, assisted in his executive responsibilities by the “Politieke Raad”, or Council of Policy. The Governor, Secunde (Vice-Governor), Garrison Commander, Independent Fiscal and other top officials sat on the Council. Many of the senior VOC officials at the Cape were well-educated individuals from the higher social classes and as a result a socio-economic divide existed between the senior officials of the VOC, officers and the more prosperous burghers on the one hand and the lower classes consisting of lesser VOC officials, soldiers, sailors, artisans and bulk of the burghers on the other.

Governor Ryk Tulbagh, who took up the position in February 1751, is generally remembered as a wise and benevolent Governor, also known as “Vader Tulbagh”.⁹⁵ Tulbagh was host to many famous visitors to the Cape (such as the explorer Captain James Cook, the Dutch Admiral Stavorinus and Robert Clive the British empire builder) who often commented very positively about Tulbagh. Sir Joseph Banks (naturalist travelling with Cook) referred to

⁹⁰ J.R. Bruijn et al, *Dutch-Asiatic shipping*, I, pp.112-4.

⁹¹ The term “VOC Yard” is used instead of “wharf” when reference is made of the “Equipagie werff”. It cannot be called a “wharf”, because it had not dock where ships could come alongside.

⁹² A. Staring, *Damiaan Hugo Staring. Een Zeeman uit de Achttiende Eeuw*, p.47.

⁹³ P.J. Idenburg, *De Kaap de Goede Hoop gedurende de Laatste Jaren van het Nederlandsch Bewind*, pp.43-4.

⁹⁴ J.R. Bruijn et al, *Dutch-Asiatic shipping*, I, pp.117-8.

⁹⁵ J. Suasso de Lima, *Geschiedenis van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, p.14.

Tulbagh as a man of “universal good character who does strict justice on all occasions to the best of his abilities”.⁹⁶

However, the late eighteenth century was the twilight of the VOC and Tulbagh’s time was a difficult period for the Cape. Already in 1743, when Van Imhoff visited the Cape, he made it clear that dark days were ahead, referring to it as “deese swaarmoedigen daagen”. Soon Cape Governors received constant reminders to be more cost-conscious and work sparingly with VOC funds.⁹⁷ At the same time the Cape experienced a few difficult years; in 1755 and again in 1762 it was ravaged by severe small pox epidemics that caused a high death rate (more than one in ten) amongst the whole population, while 1755, 1763 and 1764 were also years of severe drought. Yet, the French-British conflict in India saved the waning economy as maritime traffic increased and fleets of the belligerents provisioned at the Cape.⁹⁸

In a secret letter dated 6 September 1755 the *Heeren XVII* warned Tulbagh about an impending war between Britain and France. They feared that the war might spread out and that the Netherlands might not escape it, and ordered Tulbagh to prepare the defences and warn Captains of passing ships to be vigilant.⁹⁹ This was, however, not the first warning they received as the *Heeren XVII* wrote in 1753 that the Cape and its coast might be valuable for the belligerents in a future war. Tulbagh was ordered to survey Algoa Bay and establish if it had a safe anchorage with enough water.¹⁰⁰ At the same time the Netherlands was also involved in a war with Algeria (it broke out on 12 April 1755), and though it did not threaten the Cape, special attention had to be paid to the safety of VOC ships. The Cape had to ensure that ships were properly prepared to repel an attack at sea, but as their own gunpowder stocks were very low, they could not fully supply in all the ships’ needs.¹⁰¹ When the guns and ammunition onboard the six of the VOC return ships were inspected in January 1756, the ships were found to be poorly prepared. In the light of the tense international situation, they were worried about the safety of the VOC ships on their return voyage. The Council of Policy expressed its hope that the Netherlands would stay neutral, but as the situation was uncertain there was much concern about the defence of the Cape.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ J. Banks, *Journal of the right hon. Sir Joseph Banks during Captain Cook’s first Voyage in H.M.S. Endeavour in 1768-71 ...*, p.434.

⁹⁷ J.J.F. Joubert, *Die Kaapkolonie onder Ryk Tulbagh, 1751-1771*, pp.36-7.

⁹⁸ M.W. Spilhaus, *South Africa in the Making, 1652-1806*, pp.110-1. See also H.W.J. Picard, *Masters of the Caste: a Portrait Gallery of the Dutch Commanders and Governors of the Cape of Good Hope, 1652-1795, 1803-1806*, pp.154 and 159.

⁹⁹ CA C629, *Inkomende Brieven (Secreete)*, Heeren XVII – Tulbagh, 6/9/1755, p.94.

¹⁰⁰ J.J.F. Joubert, *Die Kaapkolonie onder Ryk Tulbagh*, pp.40-1.

¹⁰¹ C133, *Resolutiën*, 16/9/1755, pp.383-95, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁰² C134, *Resolutiën*, 20/1/1756, pp.52-79; C134, *Resolutiën*, 3/2/1756, pp.80-92; and C134, *Resolutiën*, 23/2/ 1756, pp.102-20, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

4. THE DEFENSIVE ORGANISATION AT THE CAPE

Defence was an inherent part of the VOC organisation and it maintained a permanent defence establishment at the Cape. During the seventeenth century, when the VOC established its power in Asia, armed ships were an important tool in its military make-up. However, by the eighteenth century things had changed and the mainstay of the VOC defensive system was its series of fortifications and garrisons. The Cape was fortified from the beginning and it was improved upon through the years. The Cape garrison always made out a large portion of the VOC officials at the Cape: it was 50% in 1670, but it became more and by 1779 it was 70%.¹⁰³ In addition, four of the ten governors the VOC appointed at the Cape during the eighteenth century, were professional officers. Despite this the VOC defensive system was inadequate for the challenges it would have to face during the late eighteenth century.

The defence of the Cape Peninsula rested on two variables. On the one hand the Cape was a naturally fortified position, while on the other hand it was improved by a system of man-made fortifications and provided with a standing military force. The natural defences of the Cape were the rough surrounding sea and inhibiting coastline, with a strong southeaster in summer and north-westerly gales in winter, which made it treacherous for shipping. The rocky coastline and the high swell on many of its beaches made amphibious landings dangerous, while the broken terrain with its lack of fresh water would make it difficult for an advancing army. Amphibious landings in Table Bay would be easy in summer, but dangerous in winter. Table Bay was well fortified, but Hout Bay and False Bay (specifically Simon's Bay) that provided alternative landing sites, were not fortified by the middle of the eighteenth century. Simon's Bay was seven hours travelling distance from the Cape, but the road linking it to the Cape was poor which made it possible to hinder or interdict an attacker. Though a landing in Hout Bay was possible and it was closer than Simon's Bay, its road link was also very poor. Any enemy landing at one of these locations by the middle of the eighteenth century would have much difficulty in waging a campaign due to the poor roads and required many draught animals, wagons and horses.¹⁰⁴ At the time the Cape authorities considered enemy landings at Saldanha Bay, St Helena Bay or Mossel Bay as a very vague possibility.

VOC Commissioners visiting the Cape had to inspect the military organisation and write a report on the condition of the fortifications and the general military preparedness.¹⁰⁵ Van Imhoff did not only reform the military system of the VOC, but during his visit to the Cape in 1743 he thoroughly investigated the defences at the Cape and issued a number of significant

¹⁰³ G. Schutte, 'Kompanjie en Koloniste aan die Kaap' in H. Giliomee and R. Elphick, *'n Samelewing in Wording: Suid-Afrika 1652-1840*, pp.302-3.

¹⁰⁴ CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, pp.15-7.

¹⁰⁵ See Instruksiebrief in A.J. Boeseken, *Die Nederlandse Kommissaris en die 18de Eeuse Samelewing aan die Kaap*, p.93n.

orders regarding the improvement of the Cape defences (see section on fortifications).¹⁰⁶ Commissioner Nolthenius who visited the Cape in 1748 instructed the defenders of the Cape to be ready, but gave Governor Swellengrebel no fixed orders in the case of an enemy attack on the Cape as an enemy could land in False Bay or even to the north of Table Bay. The Cape authorities had to act as the situation dictated, with "... een kloekmoedig herte en een voorsigtig en dapper beleijd, opdat met de hulpe Gods den vijand mag werden afgeslagen".¹⁰⁷

The military establishment at the Cape consisted of the regular infantry of the garrison, organised into the "Nationaal Batallion", a small Artillery Corps as well as the part-time militia (both infantry and cavalry) organised in Cape Town and the districts. Though the Governor as the highest executive authority was ultimately responsible for defence, the whole military establishment was under the command of the Commander of the Cape Garrison, generally known as the "Hoofd der Militie". He was also responsible for the fortifications and battlements, the arsenal in the Castle, the magazines, the small arms armoury and the gunnery workshops. Within the VOC bureaucracy he was equivalent to an upper merchant or "Opper Koopman", which placed him on the same level as the Secunde and the Independent Fiscal. Other military ranks were made equivalent to the various appointment levels in the hierarchy.¹⁰⁸ Neither the VOC nor the Dutch State maintained armed vessels or cruisers at the Cape to assist with its defence. By the middle of the eighteenth century, foreign warships frequently visited the Cape, including warships of Spain (historically an archenemy of the Netherlands).¹⁰⁹

The VOC was impressed with the healthy climate and the few fatalities at the Cape. As a result they wished to make the Cape a magazine, exercise ground and military centre. They despatched 237 recruits to the Cape, but due to the high mortality rate at sea and the urgent requirement for soldiers in the East, those that did arrive at the Cape were immediately shipped out and by 1762 the plan had failed. Tulbagh's very capable Secunde, J.W. Cloppenburg, thought that the military establishment at the Cape had to be improved and that a new hospital was an urgent requirement. He suggested that due to its healthy climate, the Cape should become a depot for training and maintaining soldiers for the Indies; "een Wapenplaats en Kweekschool...". If 400 recruits (besides the garrison) could be maintained at the Cape to replace ill soldiers on outbound ships, it would add to the defence of the Cape at a much lower price.¹¹⁰ Cloppenburg was also very critical of the recruitment system and the unscrupulous recruitment agents, the *zielverkopers*. The VOC should treat the soldiers they recruit better and

¹⁰⁶ A.J. Boeseken, *Die Nederlandse Kommissaris*, p.95.

¹⁰⁷ CA VC36 Memorie van den Raad Ordinair en Commissaris deeses Gouvernements Daniel Nolthenius to narigt van den Heer Hendrik Swellengrebel Raad Extraordinair van Nederlandsch Indien, 2/4/1748, pp.777-8.

¹⁰⁸ O.F. Mentzel, *Life at the Cape in Mid-Eighteenth Century*, pp.5-10.

¹⁰⁹ See for example the courtesy letters and requests for provisions from the Captains of the Spanish warships the *Astrean*, *Venus de Sangora*, *Juno* and *Pallas* during the late 1760's and early 1770's in NAN VOC4257, pp.294; VOC4265, pp.490-3; VOC4268, pp.370-75; and VOC4273, pp.332-4.

if they stayed at the Cape for a while to adapt to the climate and recuperate before being shipped to the East, it would actually bring about much improvement.¹¹¹

4.1. The System of Fortifications at the Cape

Even before the arrival of Europeans, foreign traders in the East and around the Indian Ocean, such as the Arab trading communities in Canton and Africa, or the Indians, Arabs and Chinese in Bantam, resided in special districts or strongholds.¹¹² European trading empires in the East and fortifications went hand-in-hand. The first Europeans to arrive, the Portuguese, usually fortified their factories or trading posts for greater security and to defend themselves against an actual threat – a precedent the VOC followed for the same reason.

After the development of gunpowder the high bastions and curtain walls of traditional fortifications became vulnerable to artillery fire and were easy to destroy. They were replaced by low, thick curtain walls with heavy tetrahedral angled bastions with a sharp point, situated at the corners of the walls. Geometry in design and mathematical principles became critical factors in fortification architecture.¹¹³ Due to the war with Spain and the topography of the Netherlands, fortifications were a proven means of the defence to the Dutch and by the late sixteenth century they were already specialist builders of fortifications. As the Universities of Leiden and Franeker developed it as a subject and a military engineering corps was established in the Army, the Netherlands became somewhat of a centre on fortifications by the early seventeenth century.¹¹⁴ The VOC fruitfully delved on this knowledge, as the many drawings and reports in the VOC Archive in The Hague testifies.

Due to the maritime character of the VOC, its fortifications were essentially coastal forts created at deep water anchorages or ports.¹¹⁵ Such ports were important for security, ships could be provisioned and repaired, military forces could be kept and goods could be stored and shipped. Though the VOC seized a number of large Portuguese fortifications, they also erected impressive fortifications at places like Formosa and Batavia, not to forget the fantastically expensive castle of Negapatnam (Coromandel). Before fortifications were erected the area was properly surveyed to establish the best possible location. Not only were fortifications crucial for defence against enemy warships, but it had to be difficult to take from the land, and had to be big enough to also act as barracks as well as a storage facility for ammunition, weapons and trading goods. VOC fortifications were based on those in the Netherlands. Many VOC

¹¹⁰ CA VC95, J.W. Cloppenburg, *Anotatien en Remarques op het Caabse Gouvernement*, 1769 pp.ii, v-vi, xiv.

¹¹¹ CA VC95, Cloppenburg, *Anotatien en Remarques op het Caabse Gouvernement*, pp.xvi-xviii.

¹¹² C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire*, p.188.

¹¹³ D. Libal, *Castles and Fortifications of Britain and Europe*, pp.169-201 and 231-4.

¹¹⁴ K. Zandvliet, 'Vestingbouw in de Oost' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, pp.153-4.

possessions had a main castle or citadel, supported by a series of other, lesser fortifications. Such citadels were crucial for defence and acted as the primary symbols of power. Capable designers and builders went to the East, while sailors, soldiers and slaves assisted with the building process. If enough building material was not available in the vicinity, brickworks were established or material was transported to the site.¹¹⁶

During the last years of VOC control the system of fortifications around Cape Town was substantial, but it was a complex system with various elements that were created over a long period. In 1652 Van Riebeeck created a small clay fort at the Cape for protection against indigenous and foreign enemies.¹¹⁷ The isolated location of the Cape meant that since its inception, the European settlement had the feel of a military establishment, rather than the outpost of a trading company. Long after Van Riebeeck's time, the Cape still had the demeanor of a military outpost with a Castle at its centre. News of the outbreak of the First Anglo-Dutch Sea War (1652-54) reached the Cape in 1653. It hastened building work on the fort and a small redoubt, called *Duynhoop*, was also created at the mouth of the Salt River. Permission to replace the fort with a stone castle arrived at the Cape in April 1665. During the course of the Second and Third Anglo-Dutch Wars (1665-1667 and 1672-1674), the two wars with France (1674-78 and 1689-97), the Spanish Succession War (1702-13) and thereafter, the defences of the Cape were usually improved upon and expanded in times of war. During the governorship of Chavonnes a powerful battery (*Chavonnes Battery*) was erected at the entrance of Table Bay.¹¹⁸ During the Austrian Succession War the fortifications of the Cape received much of a boost and as a result of Van Imhoff's recommendations new fortifications were created (such as *Fort de Knokke*, *'s Heer Hendriks Kinderen*, the *Imhoff Battery* and the *Zeelinie*). The main objective of the Castle and the fortifications around Table Bay was to prevent an enemy from landing on this part of the coast and to force enemy ships to stay at a respectable distance from the coast, so that they could not bombard the Castle or the town.¹¹⁹

The notion in eighteenth century documents that fortifications (specifically the *Chavonnes Battery*) effectively defended the entrance of Table Bay, might seem like an overemphasis of the value of such shore batteries because the northern entrance of Table Bay is wide and not a narrow channel, while the guns of the period had a limited range and the *Chavonnes* was twice as far from the anchorage as the Castle. So, could ships not just sail straight into the bay from the north and steer well clear of the menacing guns of the *Chavonnes*? The answer is that in the time of sailing ships, things were different. Ships had to tack to sail into the wind, and to do that they needed much sea room. For most of the year,

¹¹⁵ K. Zandvliet, 'Vestingbouw in de Oost' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.151.

¹¹⁶ K. Zandvliet, 'Vestingbouw in de Oost' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, pp.157-9 and 167.

¹¹⁷ A.C. Ras, *Die Kasteel en ander vroeë Kaapse Vestingwerke, 1652-1713*, p.8.

¹¹⁸ U.A. Seeman, *Fortifications of the Cape Peninsula 1637-1829*, pp.19-29.

¹¹⁹ CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, p.18.

specifically in summer, southerly to south-easterly winds prevailed, while in winter, when the north-westerly winds blew, Table Bay was later not used as anchorage. The prevailing current entered the Bay from the south side (around Sea Point and Granger Bay), the prevailing wind was southerly, while little wind were often experienced off Sea Point and Green Point. As a result, sailing ships entering the Bay had to approach from the south or the west and sail close-hauled (to prevent them from making too much leeway) and close to the land, to be able to anchor in the anchorage (the most protected part of the bay) in front of the Castle.¹²⁰

Captain Alleman, that served at the Cape in the middle of the eighteenth century, was not impressed with the management of its defences, stating that though the armament was good, it was badly served as the artillery force consisted of “a gunner, an under-gunner, and eight or ten *boschschieters* whose knowledge of the work [was] limited to the actual loading and firing of a gun”. They did not know how to fix or set bomb fuses, could not load or adjust a mortar, did not know how to test gunpowder and could not calculate the amount of powder necessary for firing over various distances.¹²¹ As too few artillerymen were available to expertly serve the guns, normal soldiers, sailors and militiamen had to load and fire the guns in an emergency, with the result, Alleman stated, that the shot went “wherever Providence may direct it...”.¹²²

Despite Van Imhoff's improvements more fixed defences and proper maintenance were necessary. The Council of Policy was well aware of this and stressed in October 1755 that constant maintenance work, more artillerists and new fortifications were necessary.¹²³ They ordered some improvements: First, old and broken carriages had to be replaced by new ones, and new commanders were appointed for the *Imhoff*, *Helena*, and *Tulbagh* batteries. In addition, gridirons and pincers had to be kept ready for firing red-hot-shot from the *Groote Battery* and the *Couvre face Imhoff*. Lastly, to improve the protection on some of the batteries, the artillerists had to pleat rattan (that had just arrived from Java) into breastworks and place more sandbags on the ramparts.¹²⁴ Yet, little money was spent on fortifications; only f1482 were used – essentially for 72 wheels to repair gun carriages.¹²⁵ So, exactly which fortifications formed part of the defensive network in Table Bay, at the time?

4.1.1. The Castle of Good Hope

The Castle of Good Hope, a stone pentagonal fort, was the main fortification of the Cape. After war broke out between England and the United Provinces in 1664, the VOC decided to improve

¹²⁰ The anchorage extended from where the current Duncan Dock is to the jetty close to the Castle, the location of the current railway station.

¹²¹ O.F. Mentzel, *Life at the Cape in Mid-Eighteenth Century*, pp.149-51.

¹²² O.F. Mentzel, *Life at the Cape in Mid-Eighteenth Century*, p.5.

¹²³ C133, Resolutiën, 21/10/1755, pp.416-30, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹²⁴ C134, Resolutiën, 20/1/1756, pp.52-79, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹²⁵ C134, Resolutiën, 7/12/1756, pp.486-501, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

the elementary defence of the Cape by replacing Van Riebeeck's dilapidated clay Fort with a larger stone castle. Because it was important for the guns of the Castle to be able to fire at hostile shipping, it was decided to erect it close to the sea on a slight rise, east-south-east of the old fort.¹²⁶ Construction commenced in 1666 and by 1679 (with the exception of the moat) the Castle was complete.

The pentagonal pattern was common for Dutch fortifications of the seventeenth century, and the Castle was erected in a style known as the Old Dutch system of fortress construction. Through the years many historians, journalists and writers have erroneously quoted and re-quoted each other, by stating that the Castle was designed in accordance with the principles laid down by the famous French engineer Sébastien le Prestre Marquis de Vauban (1633-1707) and his Dutch contemporary Baron Menno van Coehoorn (1641-1704).¹²⁷ This is completely wrong! The design of the Castle predate Vauban and Coehoorn, as both had not yet started their major design work on the improvement of the fortifications of France and the Netherlands respectively, when the order to build the Castle was given in 1665, and neither were yet renowned as military engineers. It is also not only a question of chronology, but of geometry in design and military architecture. The Old Dutch system was characterized by its straight bastion flanks and the bastions flanks were built rectangular onto the curtain walls. Vauban and Coehoorn on the other hand, later introduced the principle of curved flanks in the design of the bastion and provided the bastions and ravelins with orillons (extensions of bastion faces). Furthermore, according to the Coehoorn system one would find coupled bastions, with cavaliers (superstructure with a battery) above the centre of bastions.¹²⁸ The New Dutch or Coehoorn system of fortifications was only really implemented after the war with France (1672-74) as the war showed that the Old Dutch system was outdated. Dutch fortifications had to be improved and Baron van Coehoorn, influenced by the ideas of Vauban, became a leading military engineer in the last quarter of the seventeenth century.¹²⁹ Subsequently the Dutch school also exercised considerable influence abroad.

The walls of the Castle were built as a glacis or slope (being wider at the bottom), which made it stronger and could cause cannonballs to ricochet. For protection against direct fire and ricocheting rounds the defenders had the shelter of parapets, curtains and bastions, from where they could fire with an assortment of weapons on an attacker. The Castle was initially armed

¹²⁶ B. Johnson Barker, *The Castle of Good Hope from 1666*, p.22.

¹²⁷ See for example P.E. Roux, *Die Verdedigingsstelsel aan die Kaap*, p.5; E. Walker, *A History of Southern Africa*, p.44; Historical Monuments Commission, *Die Gedenkwaardighede van Suid-Afrika*, p.23; and B. Johnson Barker, *The Castle of Good Hope from 1666*, pp.16-7. Too many other examples exist. D. Libal, *Castles and Fortifications of Britain and Europe* provide much information on the development of castle architecture. The design of the Castle of Good Hope is however correctly identified and discussed in J. Ploeger, 'Military Architecture in the Netherlands and her Former Colonies' *Militaria*, 2(2) 1970, pp.67-8.

¹²⁸ D. Libal, *Castles and Fortifications of Britain and Europe*, pp.210 and 231-5.

¹²⁹ J. Ploeger, 'Military Architecture in the Netherlands and her Former Colonies' in *Militaria*, 2(2) 1970, pp.67-70; and D. Libal, *Castles and Fortifications of Britain and Europe*, pp.232-5.

with 30 guns, varying from 4 to 12-pounders, but as these were light guns the armament was substantially improved later on.¹³⁰

When the Council of Policy declared the Castle formally complete on 26 April 1679, they named the five bastions after the various titles held by Prince William III of Oranje-Nassau; being *Buuren*, *Catzenellenbogen*, *Leerdam*, *Oranje* and *Nassau*. The two land-facing bastions (*Leerdam* and *Oranje*) were higher than the others to make it is possible to turn the guns on them around and fire over the lower batteries at an enemy at sea. In such and event, these guns and artillerymen would have no protection from hostile fire.¹³¹ Along the insides of the curtain walls a large variety single and double story buildings (added to and changed through the centuries) were constructed, which included the houses for the senior officials, offices, workshops, magazines, storerooms, barracks, etc.

The entrance to the Castle was originally on the seaward side, but as it was close to the sea the soft sand around the entrance posed a problem for heavy transport and the gate faced in the direction of a potential attack. In 1684 it was moved to the landward side (between the *Buuren* and *Leerdam* bastions) and a ravelin was constructed in front of the gate, to prevent an enemy from firing directly into the gateway. Due to the vulnerability of the Castle to gunfire from the mountain slopes, Commissioner Van Reede suggested in 1685 that it should be strengthened with the construction of a high cross-wall from the middle of the curtain wall between the *Leerdam* and *Oranje* bastions, to the *Catzenellenbogen* bastion. This limited the area in which missiles could be dropped; divided the Castle's bailey into two parts, an inner bailey (used as "wapen plaats" or parade ground) and an outer bailey; and formed two defensible pockets. Shortly after the cross-wall was build (incorrectly referred to as the "Kat") various buildings were erected on both sides of it, which included the Governor's quarters, a large hall that served as council chamber and a raised porch (erroneously known as the "Kat balcony").¹³²

By the early eighteenth century, the insufficiencies of the Castle were well known. The terrain of the old fort was actually better than that of the Castle. As a result the moat around the Castle was improved, and on Van Imhoff's orders, defence in depth was added by building outworks (such as redoubts and ravelins) around the Castle from where defenders could deliver enfilade fire into the ranks of attackers who might come into close range.¹³³ The magazines as well as the emergency stores for flour and bread were improved and in 1755 an additional stone wall was erected to enhance the Castle's defence on the seaward side.¹³⁴

Alleman was impressed with the Castle: all around the Castle cannonballs, bombs and grenades were stacked in pyramids and as it was armed with a "good number of heavy guns",

¹³⁰ G. de Vries and J. Hall, *The Muzzle Loading Cannon of South Africa*, p.21.

¹³¹ O.F. Mentzel, *Life at the Cape in Mid-Eighteenth Century*, p.148.

¹³² B. Johnson Barker, *The Castle of Good Hope from 1666*, pp.33-4, 38 and 64.

¹³³ *The Reports of Chavonnes and his Council and of Van Imhoff on the Cape*, Rapport van Van Imhoff, 1743, pp.69-70.

both 24 and 36-pounders, he thought it a formidable fortification. In an artillery duel a ship Alleman stated, “being constantly in motion, is always at a disadvantage as compared with a land battery”.¹³⁵ But he also warned, the Castle’s guns did not command the ridge below Devil’s Peak, which in enemy hands could force the Castle to surrender.

Doubtless, armed with about 90 guns, the Castle was altogether an imposing sight by the late eighteenth century, but it was not in all respects an efficient fortification. Concern existed about its ability to endure a long bombardment, and about the effect the shock of its own guns would have on its structure. The Castle was also too low (virtually at sea level), it could be threatened from the slopes of Devil’s Peak and its guns covered only a limited field. Hence, the construction and location of the Castle no longer met with military requirements.¹³⁶ To support the Castle, numerous smaller forts and batteries were erected around Table Bay.

4.1.2. Fixed Defences around the Castle and towards the Salt River

Van Imhoff regarded it as impractical to improve the Castle further. As an enemy could not be prevented from landing, the garrison and militia had to annoy it with constant attacks, cut the communication with the interior and fall back upon the castle. To improve the defences around the Castle, Van Imhoff ordered a military engineer, Captain Pierre Bellidoor, to draw up a plan for “een retranchement aan de zee kant met een Contra Scarpe aan en rondom het Casteel loopende ... met een klein ravelijn aan de agterkant van dit kasteel en een couvre face voor”.¹³⁷ The plan therefore provided for defensive lines around the Castle and a new battery on the seaward side of the Castle. This was in accordance with the principles laid down by Baron Van Coehoorn. Fortifications were constructed in depth and ravelins were provided with *fauses brayes* (similar to a *couvre face* or counterguard) – a low rampart that protected the face and bastion points of a large fortification. In this case, it was the sea-facing bastions and curtain wall of the Castle that had to be protected.¹³⁸

Work on the formidable *Couvre face Imhoff*, commenced in November 1743 and was complete by July 1745. It was armed with eleven 24-pounders and six 18-pounders¹³⁹ and had to cover the sea-face of the Castle, increase the Castle’s firepower and defend the beach against a possible amphibious landing. In addition, it provided some cover to the left side of the anchorage and though it did not cover the whole anchorage, it posed a big threat for an attacking fleet and provided good defence against an enemy wishing to bombard the Castle or the town with warships.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ G.A. le Roux, *Europese Oorloë en die Kaap, 1652-1795*, pp.73 and 82.

¹³⁵ O.F. Mentzel, *Life at the Cape in Mid-Eighteenth Century*, pp.148 and 151.

¹³⁶ CA C714, Bijlagen, Guilquin and Thibault - Rhenius, 27 February 1792, pp.68-69.

¹³⁷ *The Reports of Chavonnes ... and Van Imhoff on the Cape*, Rapport van Van Imhoff, 1743, p.69.

¹³⁸ D. Libal, *Castles and Fortifications of Britain and Europe*, pp.210 and 231.

¹³⁹ G. de Vries and J. Hall, *The Muzzle Loading Cannon of South Africa*, p.22.

¹⁴⁰ CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, pp.23-4.

To further improve the defences of the Cape, Van Imhoff ordered the construction of *De Zeelinie* or the Sea Lines, a retrenchment along the beach referred to as “een Swaar borstwering langs het Strand getrokken”.¹⁴¹ The lines were between *Couvre face Imhoff* and *Fort Knokke* and its purpose was to protect the militia and soldiers deployed along the sea front from naval gunfire, to protect communication between *Fort Knokke* and the Castle and to prevent an amphibious landing on the beach to the East of the Castle. Though artillery was not placed all along the Lines, firepower was concentrated at four small batteries armed with 12 guns: From the Castle the batteries were called *Elizabeth*, *Helena*, *Charlotte*, and *Tulbagh*.¹⁴² The lines were of poor construction and only provided protection against a frontal attack; nothing for an attack from the side or the rear.

As Van Imhoff considered it possible for enemy ships to anchor and land troops out of range of the guns of the existing defences he ordered the construction of a fort on the eastern side of the Castle, at the end of the Sea Lines. Its purpose was to repulse an enemy wanting to land there, or roll up the Lines from the side.¹⁴³ Construction on the new battery called *Fort Knokke*, commenced in October 1743. It was a “Sterre-Schans” (four sided star design) with earthen ramparts on a stone foundation; it had the beach on one side and a moat on the other and was originally armed with three 18-pounders.¹⁴⁴ *Fort Knokke* was not very highly thought off, as it was too poorly armed, its guns had a poor field of fire and it had too small a garrison to prevent an enemy from attacking the lines.¹⁴⁵

Emphasis was soon placed on protecting other possible landing sites around Table Bay. Work on a battery (the *Nieuwe Battery*) on the Paarden Island side of the Salt River was approved and commenced in 1754. It was completed four years later and armed with eight or ten guns. Military experts, however, considered the position isolated as it could be cut off from the rest of the defences.¹⁴⁶

4.1.3. Fixed Defences at the Entrance to Table Bay and the Anchorage

After arriving at the Cape, Governor De Chavonnes informed the *Heeren XVII* that the Castle lacked the ability to bring adequate firepower to bear on the anchorage. He was ordered to build an elevated battery at the foot of Lion's Rump. Though building commenced in 1715 on the new battery (located along the shore to the west of the Castle) called *Mauritius*, it was only completed in 1726.¹⁴⁷ Armed with 16 guns, its purpose was to fire at ships sailing into the bay

¹⁴¹ CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, p.24.

¹⁴² G.A. le Roux, *Europese Oorloë en die Kaap, 1652-1795*, pp.80-1.

¹⁴³ CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, p.26.

¹⁴⁴ G. de Vries and J. Hall, *The Muzzle Loading Cannon of South Africa*, p.21.

¹⁴⁵ CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, p.26.

¹⁴⁶ C135, *Resolutiën*, 29/3/1757, pp.149-57, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁴⁷ G.A. le Roux, *Europese Oorloë en die Kaap, 1652-1795*, p.72.

and it covered the right (western) side of the anchorage.¹⁴⁸ Though it was also known as the *Groote Battery* or the *Waterkasteel*, it was named the *Chavonnes Battery* in 1744. Alleman emphasised that the *Waterkasteel* was dangerous to enemy ships as it was placed just above the surface of the water and its gun trajectories were relatively flat.¹⁴⁹ Guns firing at ships in a flat trajectory (compared to an angled trajectory), could be trained on the waterline and cause severe damage to the hull.

On the orders of Commissioner Nolthenius a smaller battery was erected behind the dunes in Roggebaay and between the Castle and the *Chavonnes Battery*, in the late 1740's. It was named 's *Heer Hendriks Kinderen* and was armed with six guns.¹⁵⁰ A relief view of the coast of Table Bay, drawn in 1778, showed the 's *Heer Hendriks Kinderen*, called *Kleine Battery*, as a small earthen rampart with a guard house.¹⁵¹ The 's *Heer Hendriks Kinderen* provided protection to the town and the *Chavonnes Battery* and also had the whole left (eastern) side of the anchorage within range.¹⁵²

4.1.4. The Cost of Fortifications

The small amount spent on fortifications from 1756 to 1778 is a clear indication that fortifications were seriously neglected during this period and that it was not a priority before the outbreak of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War. The salaries of soldiers in the same period ranged from the lowest, f95745:16:8 in 1763 (384 soldiers) to the highest, f134272:4:- in 1768 (434 soldiers).

¹⁴⁸ CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, p.22.

¹⁴⁹ O.F. Mentzel, *Life at the Cape in Mid-Eighteenth Century*, 1919, p.149.

¹⁵⁰ A.J. Boeseken, *Die Nederlandse Kommissarisse*, p.96; and U.A. Seeman, *Forts and Fortifications of the Cape Peninsula 1647-1829*, p.37.

¹⁵¹ CA M1/1127, *Gezicht van de Caab de Goede Hoop en den omtrek*, R.J. Gordon, 1778.

¹⁵² CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, p.22.

**Table 1 : Cost of Fortifications
At the Cape, 1755 to 1779¹⁵³**

Financial Year	Expenditure
1755-56	f1096:16:-
1756-57	f 847:01:08
1757-58	f1151:10:08
1758-59	f1145:05:-
1759-60	f1449:08:-
1760-61	f2353:01:-
1761-62	f2098:11:-
1762-63	f1349:10:-
1763-64	f1479:12:08
1764-65	f1416:03:08
1765-66	f1045:02:08
1766-67	f1514:06:-
1767-68	f1262:14:08
1768-69	f819:01:08
1769-70	f1943:12:08
1770-71	f1988:09:-
1771-72	f1118:06:-
1772-73	f1155:08:08
1773-74	f1164:18:08
1774-75	f829:02:08
1775-76	f5755:14:-
1776-77	f13088:12:-
1777-78	f5275:16:08
1778-79	f6355:17:08

Despite receiving news of the outbreak of the Seven Years War in 1757, the cost of fortifications was still low (f847:01:08, compared to the total expenditure of f472295:05:08 for that year).¹⁵⁴ It increased marginally during the rest of the war to a highest of f2353.01 in 1760-61. This was due to groundwork to the surface of some batteries, minor improvements to the *Coûvre face Imhoff*, tools for the artillerists and a few gun carriages.¹⁵⁵

After the war, spending slumped and besides maintenance work, no major work was done during the next few years. The little increase in 1775-76 was due to emergency work on the deteriorating Sea Lines and carpentry material for a new store at the *Chavonnes Battery*.¹⁵⁶ The sudden rise in expenditure between 1776 and 1778 was not money spent on fortifications, but a new powder magazine that was constructed in Stellenbosch. After its completion in the 1778

financial year, there was no important work on fortifications, despite the looming war clouds.

In December 1767 Captain Hendrik Storm and Lieutenant Johannes Fisher submitted a report on the guns of the Castle, redoubts and batteries. They pointed out that 14 guns were of no use as they were too old, rusted and worn, while another 15 would be dangerous to fire. New and larger guns (specifically 18 and 24-pounders) were a pressing requirement as many of the guns in working condition were of a small calibre and not of much use in coastal defences.¹⁵⁷ Two years later, Cloppenburg emphasised to the *Heeren XVII* that it was important to properly defend the bay by improving the fortifications and supplementing the small Artillery Corps with more officers and men. He suggested that an Artillery Captain and at least 200 men

¹⁵³ The cost of fortifications was taken from the annual financial reports contained in the resolutions of the Council of Policy. See the following resolutions: C135, 22/11/1757; C136, 28/11/1758; C137, 28/11/1759; C138, 25/11/1760; C139, 28/11/1761; C140, 23/11/1762; C141, 29/11/1763; C142, 11/12/1764; C143, 3/12/1765; C144, 9/12/1766; C145, 8/12/1767; C146, 6/12/1768; C147, 12/12/1769; C148, 11/12/1770; C149, 26/11/1771; C150, 24/11/1772; C151, 7/12/1773; C152, 6/12/1774; C153, 12/12/1775; C154, 10/12/1776; C155, 18/11/1777; C156, 1/12/1778 and C157, 7/12/1779 in <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁵⁴ C135, Resolütiën, 22/11/1757, pp.402-35, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁵⁵ See resolutions of the Council of Policy, C136, 28/11/1758; C138, 25/11/1760; and C139, 28/11/1761 in <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁵⁶ See resolutions of the Council of Policy, C154, 10/12/1776; and C155, 18/11/1777 in <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁵⁷ C145, Resolütiën, 15/12/1767, pp.353-66, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

were necessary.¹⁵⁸ Even by the late 1770's, despite the American War of Independence escalating and much tension between Britain and the Netherlands, no encompassing plan existed for improving the primary means of the defence of the Cape – its fortifications.

4.2. Military Land Forces

Since its inception, soldiers were a crucial part of the makeup of the VOC settlement at the Cape. For much of its early history the Cape settlement had to be militarily vigilant and prepared to act either against an internal threat, or defend the Cape against one of the maritime competitors of the VOC. The weakness of fixed defences was in their inflexibility and as it was possible for an attacker to evade them, in such an event the full defence responsibility would primarily rest on the shoulders of the garrison and militia.

To be able to quickly mobilise the garrison and the militia and redeploy it at the decisive point in case of an amphibious attack, was crucial to the defence of the Cape. The critical moment was during the actual amphibious landings while an attacker tried to gain a foothold. His forces would be in great disorder and as they would not yet be sufficiently organised in battle formations (so critical to fighting at the time) and he could be effectively counter-attacked and defeated in detail by an alert defender.¹⁵⁹ To perform this function and to assist with the manning of fortifications, the ground forces at the Cape consisted of the regular infantry of the garrison as well as militia infantry and cavalry.

4.2.1. The Cape Garrison

Van Riebeeck started with a small garrison of 70 men, which was soon increased. During European wars the garrison often increased in size, while after wars, it decreased. After the outbreak of war in 1744 the garrison was strengthened and maintained at about 400 men, organised into an infantry battalion with four companies. It was roughly the same during the Seven Years War (1756-63).¹⁶⁰

Similar to the average VOC soldier, soldiers at the Cape were generally recruited from lower socio-economic strata of European society. Soldiers joined the VOC for a period of five years, after which they were free to return to their countries of origin or to join for another contract period. Common soldiers were poorly paid, with the result that desertion due to promises of higher pay was common.¹⁶¹ If soldiers were sick, medical care was free but they

¹⁵⁸ CA VC95, Cloppenburg, Anotatien en Remarques op het Caabse Gouvernement, pp.iv and xi-xv.

¹⁵⁹ CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, pp.25-6.

¹⁶⁰ CA VC166, Monster Rolle van alle de Militairen het Guarniszone houdende Battaillon van Cabo de Goede Hoop, June 1756, pp.1-19; VC44, Generale Monsterrol, 1758, pp.27, 31 and 41; VC45, Generale Monsterrol, 1760, pp.27, 31, 35 and 41; and VC48, Monsterrollen - Officiere, 1761-62, p.28.

¹⁶¹ J. Black, *A Military Revolution?*, p.38.

received no stipend. The military equipment they received was placed on a personal account and if they lost it, they could be lashed or had to make good the loss. Soldiers received new uniforms when they arrived at the Cape and every three years after that. Officers usually had their uniforms tailored and the cloth for officers' uniforms was of a much higher quality. The uniforms of the officer's were of a rich scarlet cloth, braided with silver, sergeants wore blue uniforms with red lining while the men wore a blue uniform coat and blue breeches with a black hat.¹⁶²

After Governor M.P. de Chavonnes arrived at the Cape in March 1714, his cousin D.M.P. de Chavonnes became Garrison Commander. Standing Orders or a "Reglement" was created that regulated and formalised the activities of the garrison and also created a fixed routine. It dictated the battle order and formations to be used when the garrison marched and deployed. The *Reglement* was implemented and adhered to, which brought much stability to the military establishment. Because of the formalised tactics of the day, with well disciplined infantry deploying in close but thin linear formations, infantry had to be proficient in loading, aiming and firing their flintlock musket, and had to train or exercise on a daily basis. New recruits did two hourly sessions of parade drill per day. When better trained, parade drill took place once a week.¹⁶³ At the Cape soldiers performed a variety of duties. They were primarily the defenders of the Cape, but did guard duties, guarded prisoners and had to arrest deserters and criminals. They also assist with constructing and maintaining fortifications.

The soldiers of the time were a rough bunch. Order and strict discipline in the Cape Garrison was therefore a priority. The Military Statutes and Standing Orders were in accordance with the stipulations of the States-General and were updated from time to time. Set regulations existed that dictated the behaviour of soldiers as well as some of the penalties they could incur for being ill disciplined.¹⁶⁴ Soldiers that transgressed could receive severe punishment. Conspiracy, mutiny or treason carried the death penalty while other serious offences were drunkenness, desertion, the illegal firing of weapons, absence without leave and sleeping on duty (which could carry the death penalty in wartime).

A shortcoming of the VOC military system was that promotion opportunities were limited for soldiers that stayed on, non-commissioned officers (NCO's) and specifically officers. As a result the VOC did not always recruit the best quality officers and could offer little in terms of good career opportunities and remuneration. Due to the few posts available, officers at the Cape served in the same rank for long periods, without realistic prospects of promotion. The result was that serving officers were often old and not fit enough for active service anymore. They would receive a pension or "rust gagie" and permission to stay at the Cape.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² P.M. Grobbelaar, *Die Ontstaan van 'n Westerse Militêre Tradisie aan die Kaap*, p.82.

¹⁶³ P.M. Grobbelaar, *Die Ontstaan van 'n Westerse Militêre Tradisie aan die Kaap*, pp.78-88.

¹⁶⁴ S.M. Naude and P.J. Venter (eds), *Kaapse Plakkaatboek*, III, 22/8/1780, pp.107-12.

¹⁶⁵ See the discussion in CA C168 Resolusiën, 4/5/1784, pp.441-470.

First-rate NCO's could obtain a commission, but the prospect of promotion was bleak for the average soldier. This resulted in much desertion (often to ships); even though soldiers knew they could receive heavy punishment. Another way out for many soldiers was to opt for temporary leave to work for a farmer. If a farmer needed an overseer or a teacher, he could select a suitable man from the garrison and ask the Governor for his services. Such soldiers were called "pasgangers" as they had a "pas" or pass to work outside the garrison. They paid a prescribed amount ("servies geld") towards a central fund shared amongst the other soldiers, while the rest of the money they earned were their own. Contracts were normally given for five years and it was not possible to just cancel it or force the soldiers to return to the garrison. In the case of a general mobilisation or call-up, called an *algemeen opontbod*, all soldiers would have to immediately take up their allocated positions in the defence.¹⁶⁶ The *pasgangers* was not only soldiers but also artisans or sailors working for the *Equipagiemeester*. Such men often requested their release from VOC service and became free burghers.¹⁶⁷ By 1779, when burghers complained about the VOC administration Cape, the *pasganger* system was a specific bone of content because soldiers were often prepared to work for a smaller wage than the poorer burghers, specifically as they received a salary and an allowance for food.¹⁶⁸

After the outbreak of the Seven Years War, Lieutenant-Colonel Isaak Meinertzhagen was the *Hoofd der Militie* at the Cape. He was also Company Commander of the first company. At the same time the other Company Commanders were Captain Rudolff Sigfried Alleman, Lieutenant Hendrik Storm and Lieutenant Pieter Coning and the Artillery Commander was Lieutenant Simon van Henneveld.¹⁶⁹ At the time of Meinertshagen's death in 1767, Captain Hendrik Storm (promoted to Captain in 1762) was the senior officer as he had 33 years service at the Cape.¹⁷⁰ Storm took over as Acting Commander and asked the Council of Policy to be appointed as Garrison Commander.¹⁷¹ The Council supported his request and forwarded it to the *Heeren XVII* for ratification.¹⁷² This did not happen and the *Heeren XVII* appointed Major Hendrik van Prehn as "Chef der Militie". He arrived at the Cape on 30 December 1768 onboard the ship *Rijnsburg* and Storm was thanked for his contribution.¹⁷³ In 1769 Van Prehn was the Company Commander of the first company, while the other companies were under the command of Captains Storm, Warnecke and Emelman.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁶ O.F. Mentzel, *Life at the Cape in Mid-Eighteenth Century*, pp.149 and 163.

¹⁶⁷ C. Beyers, *Die Kaapse Patriotte gedurende die Laaste Kwart van die Agtiende Eeu en die Voortlewing van hul Denkbeelde*, p.46.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ CA VC166, Monster Rolle van alle de Militairen het Guarniszone houdende Battaillon van Cabo de Goede Hoop, June 1756, pp.1-19; VC44, Generale Monsterrol, 1758, pp.27 and 31.

¹⁷⁰ CA VC45, Generale Monsterrol, 1767 and 1768, p.31.

¹⁷¹ NAN VOC4249, Storm – *Heeren XVII*, 15/12/1767, pp.174-5.

¹⁷² C145, Resolutiën, 15/12/1767, pp.353-66, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁷³ C146, Resolutiën, 30/12/1768, pp.297-345, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁷⁴ CA VC45, Generale Monsterrol, 1769, pp.32-9.

Table 2 : Strength of the Cape Garrison, 1756-1779¹⁷⁵

Year	Soldiers
1756	393
1757	388
1758	n/a
1759	391
1760	420
1761	433
1762	338
1763	384
1764	433
1765	309
1766	451
1767	456
1768	434
1769	455
1770	456
1771	469
1772	456
1773	464
1774	461
1775	471
1776	474
1777	477
1778	477
1779	464

In June 1756 the garrison was organised into a battalion with four companies; two were full companies (99 men) and two were incomplete or “vacante” companies (99 and 96 men). The first two companies had a Company Commander and two junior officers while the “vacante compagnie” had a Company Commander (a Lieutenant) and one junior officer.¹⁷⁶ By October 1777 the garrison at the Cape consisted of 446 infantrymen and 31 artillerists (officers and men included).¹⁷⁷ These figures are only a rough indication of the number of soldiers in the garrison, which constantly went up and down, not on a yearly base, but even from month to month. This could be ascribed to the following reasons: Reinforcements from the Netherlands arriving at the Cape, soldiers finishing their service were constantly returning to Europe, while at times soldiers from the Indies (on their way back to Europe) might decide to stay at the Cape, soldiers married and

became free burgers or requested to become free burgers. Also VOC possessions in the East were at times reinforced from the Cape, while soldiers despatched to the East became sick during the voyage. They were then shipped to their postings, after they had recuperated at the Cape. A final reason was losses to desertion and death – well-known variables to military life in the eighteenth century.

Though many officers came and went during this period, one important appointment that took place was that of Robert Jacob Gordon. He was probably the most renowned figure in Cape affairs during the last two decades of VOC control, and most likely the only to be known outside the Netherlands. Gordon was a renowned traveller, botanist, geographer and a specialist on the interior of South Africa. He undertook numerous travels into the interior, named many locations (amongst others the Orange River) and left a fascinating collection of maps and drawings on the Cape that shows a clear picture of its natural history as well as of

¹⁷⁵ Discrepancies often exist between the Muster Role and numbers in outgoing correspondence and Dagregisters (as Boeseken had mainly used to compile her figures). In such cases, the above figures rather reflect the Muster Role. CA VC166, Monster Rolle van alle de Militairen het Guarniszone houdende Battaillon van Cabo de Goede Hoop, June 1756, pp.1-19; VC44, Generale Monsterrol, 1758, pp.27, 31 and 41; VC45, Generale Monsterrol, 1760, pp.27, 31, 35 and 41; and VC48, Monsterrollen - Officiëren, 1761-62, p.28. See also Bylae 4 in A.J. Boeseken, *Die Nederlandse Kommissaris*, p.243.

¹⁷⁶ CA VC166, Monster Rolle van alle de Militairen het Guarniszone houdende Battaillon van Cabo de Goede Hoop, June 1756, pp.1-19

¹⁷⁷ K.M. Jeffreys (ed), *Kaapsche Archiefstukken Lopende over het Jaar 1778*, Uitgaande Brieven, Council of India – Van Plettenberg, 4/2/1778 in, p.294.

many indigenous and free burgher settlements. Also in farming his contribution lives on as he bred the first *Merinos*, a fine-wool sheep, at the Cape.

Gordon's father, Jacob Gordon, was a Major-General in the Scottish Brigade of General Walter Phillip Colyear (in Dutch service). Gordon was born in 1743 and became a cadet in his father's regiment at the age of ten. In 1759 he enrolled at the University of Harderwyk, apparently in the natural sciences. Gordon was fluent in many languages (reputably Dutch, English, French, German and even Gaelic and Khoi), was tall and well built, and according to witnesses had a pleasant demeanour. Apparently bored with the peacetime soldiering, he requested permission to visit the Cape and in 1773-74 and toured the interior, with amongst others C.P. Thunberg, the eminent Swedish author and traveller. He went back to the Netherlands in 1774 and asked the *Heeren XVII* to be appointed at the Cape.¹⁷⁸ He was appointed as a Captain (the rank he held in the Scottish Brigade in the Netherlands) and arrived at the Cape on 1 June 1777.¹⁷⁹ Gordon became the senior officer next to Van Prehn and served with Captains Carel Matthys Willem De Lille and Lodewijk Christoff Warnecke.

It was a time of little military activity at the Cape, which gave Gordon the opportunity to travel the interior, study the natural history of the Cape and establish his reputation as naturalist. Gordon entertained many foreign visitors; however it is known that he specifically enjoyed British company. Hence, he was regarded with distrust in some circles and became known as the "biggest friend of the British" at the Cape. Visitors to the Cape however, regarded Gordon as a fine, jovial and learned individual.¹⁸⁰

4.2.2. The Cape Militia

Given that maintaining large bodies of European soldiers in the Indies was difficult and expensive, the VOC placed much reliance on locally raised soldiers and levies. At the Cape, it was different. Regular local military units did not exist and one was only recruited during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War. A local burgher militia trained in European warfare, did exist. Burghers were crucial for defence since the earliest days. The establishment of the Cape militia dates back to May 1659, when free burghers were formed into an infantry company called "schutters". Military service became compulsory for all men between 16 and 60 and they had to participate in annual military training.¹⁸¹ The initial VOC intention was that the militia had to serve with regular troops against a foreign invader as well as against local tribes. With the expansion of the colony the primary defence task of the regular military establishment became

¹⁷⁸ C.J. Barnard, Robert Jacob Gordon se Loopbaan aan die Kaap, p.325-8.

¹⁷⁹ C155, Resolutiën, 3/6/1777, pp.238-49, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁸⁰ C.J. Barnard, Robert Jacob Gordon, pp.385-7.

¹⁸¹ P.E. Roux, *Die Verdedigingstelsel aan die Kaap onder die Hollands-Oos-Indiese Kompanjie*, pp.50-1; and A.J. Boeseken, *Die Nederlandse Kommissaris*, p.80.

defence against maritime enemies and not indigenous enemies.¹⁸² Defence of the interior essentially became the responsibility of a unique Commando System that evolved. However, the militia still retained the duty of assisting with the defence of the Cape.

Burghers could serve in the militia infantry or cavalry. Townsfolk mostly joined the infantry, whereas in the districts most of the militiamen were cavalry. Infantry was valuable for the conventional defence of the Cape, while the speed and mobility of cavalry made it valuable for reconnaissance, delaying actions, raiding, and pursuing or harassing enemy forces. The horse also became crucial in internal operations. Militiamen had to provide their own arms, equipment, horses (cavalry) and uniforms. Weapons could be purchased from the Company, but if militiamen were issued with weapons, they had to hand it back. Infantry were armed with flintlock muskets, while the cavalry had sabres, pistols and carbines. Their uniforms were blue, with silver lining for the officers. Infantry wore white vests and breeches, while the cavalry had yellow vests and breeches.

For command and control purposes each administrative district had its own 'Burgherkrijgsraad' (Council of War), which consisted of the senior officers. In the Cape the Garrison Commander was the chairman of the *Krijgsrade*, while in the districts it was the responsibility of the Landdrost. They held regular meetings, were responsible for good order, had to inspect the signal posts to make sure it functioned and also handled appointments and promotions. All military matters had to be reported to the Garrison Commander. Burghers elected their own officers, but it had to be ratified by the Council of Policy.¹⁸³

The various militia infantry units were under the command of a Captain, while the cavalry equivalent was called a *Ritmeester*. Officers in the militia were similar in status to those in the garrison and all officers and men had to swear an oath of allegiance to the States-General, the Prince of Orange, the *Heeren XVII* and the Governor and Council of Policy. In 1768 the *Burgherkrijgsraad* decided that the militia would be structured as follows: Each company of dragoons would have a *Ritmeester*, Lieutenant and *Cornet* (the lowest officer's rank equivalent to Ensign or Second Lieutenant), four *Wagmeesters* (equivalent to Sergeant), four corporals, one *Standaardjonker*, one muster role keeper, two trumpeters and an Adjutant. An infantry company would have a Captain, Lieutenant and Ensign, four Sergeants, four Corporals, one *Vaanjonker*, one muster role keeper, two pipers, two drummers and an Adjutant.¹⁸⁴

The militia infantry and cavalry had to be proficient in handling their weapons and as a result weapons training took place regularly, with the VOC providing the ammunition. In 1687 it was decided all Cape burghers had to participate in military training exercises for at least eight days a year and from 1705 onwards annual military exercises were also held in Stellenbosch. Due to large distances and security problems in the interior, it was often very difficult for

¹⁸² H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p.27.

¹⁸³ O.F. Mentzel, *Life at the Cape in Mid-Eighteenth Century*, p.58; H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p.27; and P.E. Roux, *Die Geskiedenis van die Burgerkommando's in die Kaapkolonie*, p.54.

burghers in the more isolated parts of the colony to participate in regular manoeuvres and concessions were often made, specifically as many of them participated in regular commando's and were often under arms. In 1741 a commission appointed by the Council of Policy suggested that when the Netherlands was involved in a war, groups of about 50 burghers from the outlying districts had to perform picket duties for a period of one month at the Cape and they had to receive free housing and food. Burghers in the Cape also had to do more duties. The assembly point for the infantry was at the *Burgherwaghuis* and the cavalry had to assemble on the Parade.¹⁸⁵

In general the burgher militia performed a number of military and policing duties. In wartime they often had to do piquet or military guard duties at the Cape and the cavalry had to regularly patrol the coast around Cape Town. The Cape Town militia performed policing duties as part of the so-called *Ratelwag*, which patrolled the town at night. Infantry companies were on duty for two months at a time and an NCO and ten men patrolled the streets.¹⁸⁶ Though the militia also performed a crucial function in the interior, from the VOC perspective the most important function was to assist with the defence of the Cape in time of war.

As time went by, the role of the Cape Government in the defence of the interior became less and by the middle of the eighteenth century their role was extremely limited. In the meantime a unique defence arrangement for local defence, the so-called Commando System evolved. Its origins can be traced back to the late seventeenth century, when rudimentary mounted expeditions consisting of regular soldiers and militia under the command of a VOC official, were organised against internal enemies. Soon, few regular soldiers could be spared for such duties and if they arrived at all, it was often too late. Things changed after 1715 when the Council of Policy authorised volunteers under the command of burgher officers to act against San hunters. With the Government now accepting the need for such a system, security in the outlying districts largely became the responsibility of the burghers and their commando's. A unique rank system evolved, with ranks like *Veldkorporaal*, *Veldkornet* and *Kommandant*.¹⁸⁷ Giliomee however, pointed out that the notion of the commando being a fighting band of white men united in a common purpose is quite wrong. From the moment burghers had to serve on commando, they were allowed to bring their Khoi workers or workers of mixed blood ("Bastaard-Hottentot") along, while such individuals often went on commando in lieu of burghers. The Khoi were often heavily involved in the fighting against the San and the Xhosa and when a large commando assembled in 1774 to act against the San, many burghers were of the opinion that

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See P.M. Grobbelaar, *Die Ontstaan van 'n Westerse Militêre Tradisie aan die Kaap*, p.116.

185

C117, Resolusiën, 21/3/1741, pp.2-60, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

186

P.E. Roux, *Die Verdedigingstelsel aan die Kaap*, pp.59-60.

187

See C.M. Bakkes, 'Die Kommandostelsel met spesiale verwysing na die Historiese Ontwikkeling van sy Rangstruktuur' in P.G. Nel (ed), *Die Kultuurontplooiing van die Afrikaner*, pp.294-300.

the assistance of “good and faithful Hottentots” was essential for the success of the commando.¹⁸⁸

During the Austrian Succession War, in 1741, the Council of Policy decided, when called-up, the militia should bring their farm workers with to provide assistance. As a result of the escalating Seven Years War and concern about the safety of the Cape, the Council of Policy decided in August 1759 to broaden the militia base and that everybody capable of handling firearms should adhere to an *algemeen opontbod* or call-up.¹⁸⁹ A *Placcaat* (dated 7 September 1759), instructed the militia of the interior and their farm hands (“boereknechts”) that on the call-up signal, they immediately had to proceed to the Cape with their muskets and equipment, to await orders for further deployment. In addition, slaves (“leijfeygenen”) and Khoi labourers competent with muskets, also had to accompany them. Failing to obey these orders was regarded as treason and could result in severe penalties, even death.¹⁹⁰

Van Imhoff praised the burgher militia and thought that they were important for an effective defence of the Cape.¹⁹¹ A few years later, Nolthenius was very impressed with the growing militia, but undertook to dispatch more artillerymen from the Netherlands because there were too little know-how on the use of mortars, bombs and howitzers.¹⁹² By the second half of the eighteenth century the free burghers were reputed of being proficient with their weapons and valuable to the defence of the Colony against both an internal and external threat. In a contemporary Dutch analysis of the VOC Empire they were described thus: “zeer goede Schutters zoude zyn ...ieder Burgher iets toebrengt tot de openbare veiligheid, voorwaar een allerwenschelykste taak...”¹⁹³

After the Cape Town militia was called-up in 1759, the Council of Policy was concerned about the disorderliness with handing out of weapons and deploying troops. It placed doubt over the readiness of the Cape in case of an emergency and if the defenders did not have weapons and were not deployed, an enemy could overrun the defences with swords and pistols!¹⁹⁴ Much focus was placed on improving the deployment in the case of an emergency mobilisation. The militia had to assemble behind the Lines which provided protection from attacking ships, but a critical issue was: could they arrive in time if a surprise attack on the Cape took place?¹⁹⁵ Because of the distances and poor roads it was very difficult for the many burghers in the interior to be at the Cape quickly, or to do extended military service at the Cape. If they were away from their farms for long periods, they regularly lost cattle to theft, or wild

¹⁸⁸ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p.62.

¹⁸⁹ CA C137, Resolutiën, 14/8/1759, pp.311-2.

¹⁹⁰ S.M. Naude and P.J. Venter (eds), *Kaapse Plakkaatboek*, III, 7/9/1759, pp.25-6.

¹⁹¹ A.J. Boeseken, *Die Nederlandse Kommissaris*, p.95.

¹⁹² CA VC36 Memorie van den Raad Ordinair en Commissaris deeses Gouvernements Daniel Nothenius to narigt van den Heer Hendrik Swellengrebel ..., 2/4/1748, p.778.

¹⁹³ IMH Anonymous, *Batavia, De Hoofdstad van Neerlands O. Indien ...*, *Zevende Boek. Over den Koophandel der Hollandsche Compagnie in de Indien*, 1782, pp.122-3.

¹⁹⁴ C137, Resolutiën, 14/8/1759, pp.288-321, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁹⁵ CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, pp.25-6.

animals and numerous other security problems also arose. Though in theory, the Cape could raise three to four thousand men, Alleman doubted if it would ever be possible.¹⁹⁶

Since not only the free burgers, but company officials and also so-called *vrijzwaren*, were eligible for military service, the militia consisted of a whole range of units. The first burgher militia units created were in Cape Town. By 1700, as Cape Town expanded, the Cape burgher infantry was organised into two companies. By 1768 another two companies were added and in 1789 they numbered 568 infantrymen. Cavalry was also organised as part of the militia. In 1744 the Cape burger cavalry counted 144 and a second dragoon company was formed and in 1789 they had grown to 250.¹⁹⁷ In accordance with a decision taken in 1687 all boys between nine and sixteen were organised in a special squad and had to march on the Grand Parade every Saturday, while on New Year they paraded under their own standard.¹⁹⁸ It is not, however clear, if this was still the practice during the late eighteenth century.

The first burgher militia unit in the country was established in Stellenbosch in 1686. By 1763, Stellenbosch had four dragoon companies and one infantry company.¹⁹⁹ Burgher militia units also went hand-in-hand with the creation of the districts of Swellendam in 1745 and Graaff-Reinet in 1786. Both districts had no infantry. Swellendam had one dragoon company in 1745, and two by 1789, at which date Graaff-Reinet had three dragoon companies.²⁰⁰

A corps of old servicemen, the *Corps de Invalides* was formed in 1743. Their responsibility was to act as a police force during a crisis and they also had to attend the yearly exercises. Their numbers grew so fast that by 1762 they counted more than a hundred, of which many could still do active service in times of need. As a result a new unit called the *Compangie de Reserve* was formed from the fittest amongst the *Invalides*. As they had to perform operational service, they had to be proficient with their weapons and participate in exercises. Their battle position was to assist at the *Couvre face Imhoff*.²⁰¹ Similar companies were formed in Stellenbosch and Swellendam in 1770 and 1787 respectively.

The *Pennisten Corps* was formed from the VOC officials that did not serve in one of the other units. As many of them were clerks, the designation *Pennisten* was used. Despite worries about the deployment and readiness of the militia in 1759, the *Pennisten Corps* was considered sufficiently exercised and good in handling their weapons.²⁰² They were organised into two companies and members of the Council of Policy acted as their officers. In a crisis they had to be deployed at the *Couvre face Imhoff* to assist the reserve company.²⁰³

¹⁹⁶ O.F. Mentzel, *Life at the Cape in Mid-Eighteenth Century*, p.152.

¹⁹⁷ P.E. Roux, *Die Verdedigingstelsel aan die Kaap*, pp.50-54.

¹⁹⁸ P.M. Grobbelaar, *Die Onstaan van 'n Westerse Militêre Tradisie aan die Kaap tot 1795*, p.113.

¹⁹⁹ J.C. Looock, 'Militêre Geskiedenis' in F. Smuts (ed), *Stellenbosch Drie Eeue*, pp.425-8.

²⁰⁰ P.E. Roux, *Die Verdedigingstelsel aan die Kaap*, pp.50-54.

²⁰¹ C140, Resolusiën, 21/12/1762, pp.390-92, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁰² C137, Resolusiën, 14/8/1759, pp.288-321, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁰³ C140, Resolusiën, 14/12/1762, pp.369-89, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

Free blacks, former slaves, convicts whose sentences expired as well as individuals banished from the VOC possessions in the East formed part of the militia by 1722, though they were a small part of the population. As Khoi workers and persons of mixed blood served in the burgher commando's, the idea to use them in the defence of the Cape, became an accepted one.²⁰⁴ The *Vrijswarten* was formed from all freed slaves and children of freed slaves. It is not always possible to exactly judge the heritage of the officers and NCO's in the *Vrijswarten*, but it seems that by the middle of the eighteenth century, the officers were free burgers, while the NCO's were black or persons of mixed blood. When new appointments were made in December 1762, the two Lieutenants were Danielsz and Arents, while the names of the three NCO's, Sergeant Jonas van Batavia and corporals, Albert Isaaksz van Batavia, and Jan Abrahamsz van de Cúst, indicate that they were either of mixed blood or former slaves.²⁰⁵ A *Corps der Vrijen* was established in 1787 in Stellenbosch from the ranks of those of mixed blood born outside slavery.²⁰⁶

4.3. Coastal Defence and the Signal System at the Cape

4.3.1. The Signal System for Identification and Call-up

Signal systems do not often form part of military histories. However, in the case of the eighteenth century military history of the Cape, the value of a well functioning signal system and its contribution in the defence of the Cape should not be underestimated. The VOC established an extensive signal system at the Cape both along the coast and into the interior. In an age of poor and slow communication, the signal system played a crucial role and had a number of purposes. Its maritime related functions were to warn the Cape authorities about approaching ships, it was a means of identifying between friend and foe, it had to prevent an enemy from launching a surprise attack on the Cape and also served as a means of communicating with Captains of VOC and Dutch ships. Internally it was crucial for making alarm and calling-up the burgher militia in times of crisis.

Robben Island was a valuable signal and reconnaissance post. Despite its flatness, it became the forward lookout position of the Cape when low-lying clouds or mist blocked the view from the Lion's Rump or Head. A signal post was created on the eastern side of the Island in 1657 and when ships approached, signals were conveyed with flags and gunshots to indicate the number of ships and also if they were Dutch or not. It was sometimes difficult to hear the

²⁰⁴ V.C. Malherbe, 'The Khoekhoe Soldier at the Cape of Good Hope. How the Khoekhoen were drawn into the the Dutch and British defensive systems, to c 1809' in *Military History Journal*, 12 (3) 2002, pp.94-6.

²⁰⁵ C140, Resolutiën, 14/12/1762, pp.369-89, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁰⁶ C174, Resolutiën, 26/1/1787 pp.124-52, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

gunshots from Robben Island, specifically if a strong southerly wind was blowing, and the signals were refined a number of times during the eighteenth century.²⁰⁷

Van Riebeeck created signal posts on the “Leeuwenbergh” (Lion’s Rump) and in the “Leeuwencloof” (Kloofnek) between Table Mountain and “Leeuwencop” (Lion’s Head) to warn the Cape of approaching ships. Governor Goske wished to have earlier warning of approaching ships and created a signal post with a flag pole and two small bronze guns on Lion’s Head in March 1673.²⁰⁸ When a ship approached, the lookout on Lion’s Head had to hoist the Dutch flag, fire a warning shot and stand on a large flat rock indicating the direction of the approaching ship. If there were more than one ship, the process was repeated for each ship. The other lookout then had to go down and warn the Governor about the approaching ship(s).²⁰⁹ The post had a number of drawbacks; the flagpole was often damaged by lightning, it was difficult and timely to ascent and descent and mist or low clouds covered it in bad weather. Nonetheless, it stayed an important lookout position and was in service up to the end of the VOC era.

Flags with a secret colour scheme flew from Lion’s Head and Lion’s Rump, to indicate to the Captains of VOC ships if the Cape was still in Dutch hands or not. The colour of these flags changed regularly; first every year, but from 1748 on a monthly basis. During winter the Lion’s Head flag was displayed on a prominent high dune in False Bay and the Lion’s Rump flag, at Simon’s Bay point. The *Heeren XVII* decided on the flags a year in advance and communicated it in secret sealed instructions to the VOC possessions.²¹⁰ As the VOC was concerned about vulnerability of their settlement at the “far corner of Africa”, their captains received sealed instructions regarding the secret signals applicable at the Cape when they departed from the Netherlands, Batavia or any other VOC port. They were only allowed to open the orders within sight of the Cape.²¹¹ If the Cape was overrun, the VOC did not want their ships to fall into enemy hands. But it must be emphasised that it essentially was the safety of the extremely valuable cargoes onboard the ships, and not the Cape, which concerned the VOC most.

The *Chavonnes Battery* had a flag post, to warn ships entering the bay that it was an armed battery. At the same time, the so-called *Prinsevlag* of the United Provinces was hoisted on the Castle until acknowledged and saluted by incoming ships. A piquet at the Castle had to keep a good lookout for signals from the various positions and immediately inform the authorities of eventualities.²¹² The signallers and the signal system around the Cape were under the control of the *Equipagiemeester*. He also had to see to the maintenance of the system and make sure that the signallers were in possession of the correct flags.

²⁰⁷ D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, pp.276 and 349-54.

²⁰⁸ G. de Vries and J. Hall, *The Muzzle Loading Cannon of South Africa*, p.30; and D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, pp.273 and 280.

²⁰⁹ C.F. Brink, *Nieuwste en beknopte beschrijving van de Kaap der Goede-Hope, benevens een dag-verhaal van eenen landtogt, naar het binnenste van Afrika, door het land der kleine en groote Namacguas...*, pp.33-4.

²¹⁰ D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, p.273-81.

²¹¹ J.R. Bruijn et al, *Dutch-Asiatic shipping*, I, pp.35 and 122.

In addition to the above a signal system with an internal function was created, which was just as crucial to the defence of the Cape. In case of an emergency it was imperative to the Government to mobilise the burgher militia at short notice. The first signal system was established after news of war reached the Cape in 1674 and from 1690 onwards a signal system primarily based on signal guns was developed for the call-up. Signal posts were erected on prominent locations to send the alarm signals from point-to-point and as the colony expanded, the signal system grew.

In case of a general mobilisation of the whole militia (called an *algemeen opontbod*) the *Bloedvlag* (red flag) were hoisted at the Castle and two shots were fired from the Buren bastion.²¹³ At Plattecloof, the signal gun fired, the *Prinsevlag* were hoisted and were kept flying for as long as the call-up lasted. The successive signal post had to keep on firing until the next gun fired and smoke appeared at the next signal post. The keepers of the signal stations were responsible for maintaining the signal gun and its carriage and had to clear the area around the gun emplacements to prevent fires. If the keeper of a signal station went away, he had to appoint a responsible person to act on his behalf. Signalers were reminded that they had a crucial responsibility as they could jeopardize the safety of the whole colony and its people, if they did not perform their duty.²¹⁴

The signal system was not always well maintained and in 1741 it was even suggested that riders should convey the message. The Council of Policy did not accept this proposal and decided if the signal guns were fired (an *algemeen opontbod*) the Landdrosts, burgher officers and *Veldkorporaals* had to spread the word by mounted messengers and alert the various farms so that the militia could proceed to the Cape.²¹⁵

As the Seven Years War escalated, the Cape had to be ready to defend itself in case an enemy suddenly appearing over the horizon. The signal system had to be more effective in order to mobilise the militia of the whole interior (Stellenbosch, Drakenstein and Swellendam) to assist with the defence.²¹⁶ In accordance with a report by A.V. Schoor (dated 8 August 1759) the Council of Policy selected twelve new locations for signal guns, Plattecloof received a 12-pounder gun instead of the 4-pounder it had and the old guns at the other signal posts were replaced with 6-pounders.²¹⁷ The signal system was tested from time-to-time, to make sure that it functioned well and the inhabitants were warned beforehand that it was only an exercise.²¹⁸ This improved signal system was basically in effect until the end of the VOC period at the Cape.

²¹² C137, Resolusiën, 14/8/1759, pp.288-321, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ S.M. Naude and P.J. Venter (eds), *Kaapse Plakkaatboek*, III, 7/9/1759, pp.25-7.

²¹⁵ C117, Resolusiën, 21/3/1741, pp.2-60, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²¹⁶ S.M. Naude and P.J. Venter (eds), *Kaapse Plakkaatboek*, III, 7/9/1759, p.23.

²¹⁷ C137, Resolusiën, 4/9/1759, pp.326-56, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²¹⁸ S.M. Naude and P.J. Venter (eds), *Kaapse Plakkaatboek*, III, 6/12/1776, p.98.

4.3.2. VOC Outposts as Part of Coastal Defence

As the colony expanded and due to the extensive coastline, VOC outposts were established along the coast at locations such as False Bay, Hout Bay, Saldanha Bay, St Helena Bay, Mossel Bay and Plettenberg Bay. When foreign or enemy ships were sighted, or visited these locations, soldiers at the outposts usually had orders on how to inform the Cape authorities. If there was no outpost, farmers along the coast had to convey the message to the nearest *drostdy* or outpost, and the Castle was then warned. Burghers living in these areas were also ordered to remove all livestock, draught animals and wagons and move into the interior on the appearance of enemy warships in wartime.²¹⁹

False Bay was close to Cape Town, it was undefended and could serve as a landing place for an attacking enemy that could march onto Cape Town and cut its communications with the interior.²²⁰ As a result it had to become part of the early warning system of the Cape. Since the 1670's, but specifically in the early 1700's, cattle herders, fishermen and farmers active along the west coast of False Bay had to warn the Cape in case an enemy arrived in False Bay. It was only after Simon's Bay was established as a post to handle shipping that it became a formal part of the signal and defence system. The secret flags were also displayed in False Bay and the Cape had to be informed of arriving ships.²²¹ By the late eighteenth century four signal posts, within eyesight of each other functioned between Simon's Bay and the Castle. Signals were conveyed from the one to the other and the Castle would know within an hour if friendly or enemy ships arrived in False Bay. In daylight, gunshots and flags were used, while at night a system of gunshots, lanterns and fires conveyed the message.

The fact that Simon's Bay was a harbour, had maintenance and repair workshops, storehouses and produced food in the immediate area, but had no fortifications, was a strategic weakness in the defence of the Cape. Simon's Bay was the ideal position for an offensive force to establish itself before launching operations against the rest of the Cape and could be very valuable to an attacking force. As a result all burghers were ordered to move to the interior with their wagons, provisions and livestock, if the bay was threatened by an enemy force.²²²

With more foreign ships (specifically British, French and Danish) using Simon's Bay after the Seven Years War, its lack of defences became common knowledge. The Council of Policy referred to it as a "seer sorgelijke" situation and wished to protect the bay. In 1767 Tulbagh suggested to the *Heeren XVII* that they erect two batteries with ten to twelve 24-pounders in Simon's Bay. The one battery had to be placed at the end of the beach, to the left of the Post

²¹⁹ G.A. le Roux, *Europese Oorloë en die Kaap, 1652-1795*, p.86.

²²⁰ O.F. Mentzel, *Life at the Cape in Mid-Eighteenth Century*, p.151.

²²¹ For a discussion of early development of False Bay and the creation of the various VOC posts along the coast and their function, see D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, pp.287-348.

²²² CA C122, Resolusies, 22/9/1744, pp.409-10.

Holder's house, while the other one had to be to the south of the storehouses. Tulbagh asked the *Heeren XVII* to provide 20 or more 24-pounders, and even suggested that the guns arrive in winter, so that it would not be necessary to transport them overland.²²³

They received no reply, and a three man commission under Van Prehn were appointed four years later to investigate the creation of these two batteries in Simon's Bay. In March 1772 the commission reported that as False Bay was big, ships would still be able to stay out of reach of batteries in Simon's Bay and they could land troops elsewhere and attack the fortifications from behind. But as Cape Town was eight hours marching distance; it was important to defend the main landing beach, anchorage and facilities in Simon's Bay with forts.²²⁴ The batteries would not be too expensive as material was available in the vicinity. A NCO and four gunners could man each of the fortifications, while the staff at the post house could assist in an emergency.²²⁵ The Council again requested permission from the *Heeren XVII* and again received no approval.

As False Bay could be well-observed from "t hoek van de Steenberg", or Muizenberg, a lookout was placed there during the Austrian Succession War. After the war it was permanently manned. Muizenberg linked Simon's Bay with Cape Town, but the road between Muizenberg and Simon's Bay was very poor and transport of heavy material was difficult and laborious. The VOC kept a carriage for important guests at Muizenberg and in 1756 Tulbagh had a stable for 100 horses erected to deploy cavalry there in wartime. A sergeant and eight soldiers were stationed at Muizenberg to guard the road, but besides the stable and a post house, it had no military buildings.²²⁶

Muizenberg was also a remarkable natural defensive position as only a narrow passage existed between the mountain and the sea, and between the mountain and the Sandvlei marshes. The perception was that a relatively small detachment of first rate troops could defend it against a much larger enemy. J.S. Stavorinus was so struck by Muizenberg's geographic and strategic location that he thought 50 resolute defenders could hold it against an attacking force of a thousand men for a while. When he visited Muizenberg in 1774, there were only two lookouts, but he remarked on the big stable for the burgher cavalry.²²⁷ Muizenberg was also somewhat of a symbolic military perimeter. When 200 French soldiers had to relocate from a ship in False Bay to another in Table Bay in April 1772, their muskets were loaded onto wagons at Muizenberg and taken to Table Bay, while they had to march.²²⁸

²²³ CA C145, Resolutiën, 24/11/1767, pp.319-24.

²²⁴ CA C150 Resolutiën, 10/3/1772, pp.150-66.

²²⁵ NAN VOC4265, Wegens het gedaan nader onderzoek nopens het effect der in de baay Fals geprojecteerde twee batterijen, pp.422-7.

²²⁶ D. Sleigh, *Die Buiteposte*, pp.341-2.

²²⁷ J.S. Stavorinus, *Reize van Zeeland over de Kaap de Goede Hoop en Batavia naar Samarang, Macasser, Amboina, Suratte enz*, p.45.

²²⁸ CA VC31, Dagregister, 16/4/1772.

Hout Bay had an anchorage and a good landing beach, but since the 1670's the VOC had only used it for its wood. Communication with Hout Bay was essentially by boat, as the link overland went across Constantia Neck and through the densely vegetated valley. Hout Bay only played an important role in the defence of the Cape after the outbreak of the Fourth Anglo Dutch War.

From a shipping point of view Saldanha Bay was excellent. Nearly enclosed by land, it provided a safe anchorage in all weather conditions and it had a relatively narrow and deep entrance which meant no large swell inside the bay. The bay had three beaches (on its northern, eastern and western shore) that could be used for ship repairs, but specifically the beach of the Hoedjies Bay was ideally suited to careen and repair ships. In bad weather or when strong southerly winds blew ships out of the roadstead in Table Bay, they could hide in Saldanha Bay.²²⁹ Ships would put into Saldanha Bay because of a shortage of food and water, a lack of crew, illness and disease onboard, storm damage and leaks, or even when strong headwinds and currents made progress difficult. In the VOC era altogether 61 ships were despatched to Saldanha Bay for repairs and about 140 ships had to put into the bay due to an emergency. Between 1750 and 1795 about nineteen ships went to Saldanha Bay for repairs and thirteen ships put into Saldana after experiencing some or other emergency at sea.²³⁰ From a defence point of view, Saldanha Bay could be made very secure by placing strong fortifications on both sides of the entrance and on Marcus Island (in the middle of the entrance to the bay). So, why was the bay not developed? Saldanha Bay had little fresh water, specifically in summer when very little rain would fall, it had very little fuel and there were no wood. A new fresh water fountain was discovered in 1760, which improved the situation a bit, but did not solve it.

Due to the interest other European countries, notably the French, showed in Saldanha Bay, VOC soldiers did intermittent duty there since 1666. The VOC outpost "Saldanha Baaij" became permanent in 1685. The Post Holder had to despatch a mounted messenger to the Cape to report the arrival and departure of ships. If foreign ships put into the bay in need of provisions, they had to receive just enough (excluding wheat or flower), to reach the Cape or False Bay.²³¹

As Saldanha Bay had no defences, it was virtually impossible to defend it against an amphibious landing because of its size and its many calm beaches. Its greatest defence however, was in its near-desert like surroundings with its lack of fresh water and its distance from the Cape, which was believed, would dissuade aggressors. Nonetheless, if enemy warships entered the bay in wartime, the Post Holder and his men had to remove all livestock

²²⁹ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa. In which is considered the Importance of the Cape of Good Hope to the different European powers, as a Naval and Military Station ...*, Volume II, pp.259-61.

²³⁰ D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, pp.437 and 440.

and destroy the provisions they could not take with them. The Post Holder was also ordered to make sure that burghers living in the area were aware that they also had to move their livestock, wagons, draught animals, food and all material that might be of assistance to an enemy, into the interior in such an eventuality.²³²

During the sixteenth and early seventeenth century ships often stopped at Mossel Bay for replenishment. VOC ships seldom used the bay, but it was of value because in an emergency it could act as a haven for ships from the East and the surrounding area was fertile, provided good grazing and had much wood. The Dutch feared that their competitors might occupy it and threaten Dutch shipping. In 1752 a French expedition from Mauritius surveyed the surrounding coast, but nothing resulted from it.²³³ In 1776 a French ship *Le Lion* on its way to Mauritius stopped at Mossel Bay, put up tents and landed some of its sick. The Dutch authorities again feared that the French planned to establish a post in the area, but it did not happen. It was only a decade later, after the British showed considerable interest in the area, that the VOC established a permanent post in the bay. In St Helena Bay (to the north of Saldanha Bay) the Dutch did have a brief intermittent military presence during the Austrian Succession War, but a permanent post was only created in the 1780's.

5. THE SEVEN YEARS WAR (1756-63) AND THE CAPE

In the middle of the eighteenth century France was the greatest military power in Europe due to fact that it was big, populous, wealthy and united. On the continent the power of its former enemy Spain had dissipated and it now had powerful enemies in the Habsburg Empire and in a rising Prussia. Britain, on the other hand, though geographically European, was more a global power being protected from the stronger continental armies by the English Channel and the British Royal Navy. The British focussed on international trade and empire and only occasionally became involved in European wars. They more readily provided money to their continental allies.²³⁴

As neither Britain nor France emerged victorious from the Austrian Succession War, victory in America and India had to be determined by further wars. French-British colonial rivalry continued and immediately erupted in conflict in the colonies when the Seven Years War broke out on 7 May 1756.²³⁵ It was really two different wars. On the European continent the spirited Prussian King, Frederick the Great, fought a dramatic war for survival against large French, Russian and Austrian armies. In one of the greatest feats in the history of warfare, he personally led his army through the intense years of war, while his vast enemies did not

²³¹ A.P. Roux, *Die Geskiedenis van Saldanhabaai, St Helenabaai en Dasseneiland, 1652-1806*, pp.69-76; and D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, pp.417-25 and 451-2.

²³² CA C122, Resolusiën, 22/9/1744, pp.409-410; and VC28, Dagregister, 4/2/1755.

²³³ D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, pp.596-601.

²³⁴ P. Browning, *The Changing Nature of Warfare*, pp.12-4.

succeed in defeating Prussia. At the same time, Britain and France were engaged at sea, in North America and in India. This war is often depicted as the first in a series of global wars, but the conduct of it was typically eighteenth century, which clearly shows the difference between war and warfare, the methods of warfare were limited, but not the scope of the war.²³⁶

France and Britain realised that success would depend on control of the sea. In the East Indies the struggle for empire intensified, sea power was important for success and British naval forces cooperated with the forces of the EEIC and Robert Clive (who laid the foundation of British control of India). Clive appreciated the significance of sea power, stating that British naval supremacy "if rightly used, must lead to supremacy in India".²³⁷ With the sharper focus on global sea power and the intensifying conflict in the India, it was obvious that much more focus would be placed on the Cape due to its strategic location on the sea route to the East.

Britain achieved naval successes against the French Navy in the Atlantic, and in an effective exercise of maritime power projection, captured Canada and a number of Caribbean possessions from France. Initially French and British naval forces were balanced in the East, but Britain could now reinforce its naval power in the East, which tipped the balance against the French.²³⁸ They had the naval ability to thwart French attacks (such as the attack on Madras, 1758-9), and supported the army as it defeated the French army in India in 1761. Pondicherry was cut off from the sea and after the French naval commander, D'Aché abandoned it, it had to surrender. It was a severe blow to French hopes of empire in India. The EEIC praised the British government for its assistance, which together with the effective use of sea power has founded an empire.²³⁹ This was a lesson the French dearly learned, and would later relearn. The British learnt valuable lessons concerning the inherent complexity of amphibious operations, the difficulty of having to operate in the far-off regions and the value of good bases. British success was facilitated by bases, from where troops and war supplies could be had. For the first time, sea power had become "a decisive factor in the fate of European states".²⁴⁰

The Seven Years War was the first large European war in which the Netherlands did not participate. They should have assisted Britain in accordance with the 1678 agreement, but the Dutch excuse was that Britain fought in America, while the agreement pertained to Europe.²⁴¹ Opinion in the Netherlands was divided. At court pro-British sentiments existed, while the merchants and commercial class were decidedly anti-British.²⁴² The Dutch Navy continued to provide naval escorts for returning convoys, which became more rigorous during the war. The Dutch soon realised that large profits could be made from being neutral, and not being a major

²³⁵ H.W. Richmond, *The Navy in India 1763-1783*, pp.15-6.

²³⁶ P. Browning, *The Changing Nature of Warfare*, p.10.

²³⁷ Quoted in G.D. Scholtz, *Suid-Afrika en die Wêreldpolitiek 1652-1952*, p.54.

²³⁸ J. Black, *Warfare in the Eighteenth Century*, p.107.

²³⁹ R. Furneaux, *The Seven Years War*, pp.66-9.

²⁴⁰ R. Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare, 1650-1830*, p.213.

²⁴¹ G.D. Scholtz, *Suid-Afrika en die Wêreldpolitiek 1652-1952*, p.54.

²⁴² J.I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, p.1081.

force in international politics anymore. But it had its risks. Problems soon arose as the British claimed the right to judge if Dutch cargoes were contraband, and enforced it by stopping and searching Dutch ships on the high seas to prevent them from supporting France.²⁴³ The Dutch thought the British were too quick to declare cargoes contraband, and Dutch losses (in ships and cargoes) amounted to twelve million Guilders during the first two years of the war.²⁴⁴ As a result various deputations complained to the Stadtholder and the States-General about the seizure of Dutch ships.²⁴⁵ The debate continued publicly as merchants, ship-owners and pamphlet writers petitioned the government to provide better protection and prevent further economic harm to Dutch interests.²⁴⁶ Diplomatically the States-General often complained to the British, asking them to repatriate captured Dutch ships and respect freedom of trade and neutral ships in times of war.²⁴⁷ In the end the Dutch fitted out more convoy escorts and a number of confrontations between Dutch warships and British squadrons seeking to inspect Dutch vessels took place.²⁴⁸

The Captain of a Portuguese ship brought news of the war to the Cape in February 1757.²⁴⁹ Hostilities did not affect the Cape directly and historians mostly focus on the large number of visiting French and British ships that boosted the local economy during the war. However, they often miss the fact that it was a very important event in the history of the Cape. To both the belligerents, the Cape was a crucial refreshment post for large forces and the sea route around it became very important. It gained strategic significance.

Before war broke out the *Heeren XVII* warned that France and Britain were on the verge of a full-scale war. They expressed their concern about the safety of the VOC ships returning to Europe and repeatedly ordered the Governor to ensure that ships were capable of defending themselves.²⁵⁰ The Council of Policy hoped that the Netherlands would stay neutral, but in case of an attack the VOC ships at the Cape (the *Schuylenburg* and two hookers, *Termeijen* and *de Hector*), had to anchor as close as possible to the fortifications so that they could be protected. Their crews (bar six men per vessel) had to take position in the line, while the men that remained onboard, had to beach the vessels and set them alight.²⁵¹ After the outbreak of the war, much emphasis was placed on the safety of return ships and commanders were reminded

²⁴³ J. R. Bruijn, *The Dutch Navy of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, p.155.

²⁴⁴ E.S. van Eyck van Heslinga, 'A Competitive Ally...' in G.J.A. Raven and N.A.M. Rodger (eds), *Navies and Armies*, p.1.

²⁴⁵ NAN 1.01.50 – 132, Extract uit het Project van een Advis, om nogmaals aan het hof van Groot Brittannien representatien te doen over de menigvuldige depredation, 3/11/1757.

²⁴⁶ See various pamphlets in NAN VOC4727, Pamphlet addressed to *Princess ...*, I. Tirion, 7/12/1758; as well as *Wederlegging van het vertoog over het gedrag van Groot-Britanje omtrent Neutrale Natien*, I. Tirion, 1759.

²⁴⁷ NAN 1.01.50 – 132, Extract uit 't Register der Resolutien van de Hoog Mogende Heren Staten Generaal der Verenigde Nederlanden, 20/9/1759; and VOC4733, Verhouding tot Europese mogenheden, 1758-60.

²⁴⁸ J. R. Bruijn, *The Dutch Navy of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, p.155.

²⁴⁹ C135, Resolutiën, 15/2/1757, pp.113-26, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁵⁰ C134, Resolutiën, 20/1/1756, pp.52-79; C134, Resolutiën, 3/2/1756, pp.80-92; and C134, Resolutiën, 23/2/ 1756, pp.102-20, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

of the dangers of sailing back to Europe; they had to keep their ships ready to defend themselves and were ordered to exercise forming a line of battle and the line-ahead formation while at sea.²⁵² The main emphasis was on the safety of the ships and despite many lamentations about the war in Council minutes, no dramatic action was yet taken to improve the defence of the Cape. Things were soon to be stirred-up.

After a few indecisive French-British engagements along the Coromandel Coast of India, in 1757-58, the French squadron of Commodore D'Aché was forced to return to Mauritius for repairs and replenishment. However, Mauritius was in a near destitute state, with a shortage of almost everything. Besides food D'Aché lacked rigging, wood and war materials and he complained to his superiors in France that they can expect little from a squadron in such a poor state and of men dying from hunger. D'Aché was forced to despatch ships to the Cape for provisioning. He went to India again in 1759, but with British naval strength reinforced, abandoned Pondicherry and was forced to return to Mauritius.²⁵³ The Cape was an important source of supply to the French forces throughout the war.

The sails of the first of D'Aché's ships were seen at sea on Wednesday 27 December 1758 and when nine French ships (including warships) sailed into Table Bay the next afternoon, it created quite a commotion. The Cape had no prior knowledge of the visit and the Council of Policy met immediately. In order to defend the Cape in case the ships attacked, the Cape was put in a state of military readiness for "een wackeren teegenstand". The infantry battalion deployed behind the lines; the *Pennisten Corps* under the command of Independent Fiscal Pieter van Reede van Oudshoorn was mobilised, supplied with weapons and deployed on the fortifications; the Cape burgher militia (both the cavalry and infantry) was mobilised; the commanders of all the fortifications were ordered to prepare the guns with live ammunition; VOC artisans, woodchoppers and workers had to assist on the redoubts, while the crew of the VOC ship *Hector* went ashore to assist with the artillery (only five men stayed behind to run her ashore and set her alight in case of an attack).²⁵⁴ The French ships anchored in a line during the late afternoon and an officer came ashore to present the compliments of the French Commodore, the Chevalier de Ruis, to the Governor. He stated that the squadron consisted of four warships, the flagship *L'illustre* (64), *Le Fortune* (64), *Le Centaure* (70), *Le Duc d'Orléans* (60) and five transport vessels. They departed from Mauritius on 18 November and came to the Cape for provisions.²⁵⁵

The next morning (29 December) the French ships properly saluted the Castle with 15 guns, receiving the same in reply. Chevalier de Ruis came ashore and assured Tulbagh that they had no belligerent intentions; they urgently required supplies and his force will be orderly

²⁵¹ C134, Resolutiën, 20/1/1756, pp.52-79, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁵² C137, Resolutiën, 16/1/1759, pp.80-91, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁵³ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, pp.308-10.

²⁵⁴ C136, Resolutiën, 28/12/1758, pp.438-43, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁵⁵ CA VC28, Dagverhaal der voornaamste zaaken, 27/12/1758 and 28/12/1758.

and controlled.²⁵⁶ The French were allowed to buy provisions, but the Council of Policy decided the Cape should stay on alert. The artisans and certain workers returned to their posts, but remained on stand-by, while others had to do military duty. Skipper Hans Harmsz of the *Hector* was relieved from his post at the *Groote Battery* and allowed to continue with his voyage to South America. A detachment of between 75-80 dragoons (burgher cavalry) was placed on military duty, while a further 50 dragoons from Stellenbosch and Drakenstein had to report at the Cape on 15 January 1759 for duty. After a month, they had to be relieved by a similar detachment.²⁵⁷

Early in January the French frigate *La Renommé* (18) as well as two French Company ships equipped for war, *Le Condé* (50) and *Le Vengeur* (64), also arrived from Mauritius. *Le Condé* and *Le Vengeur* had a British East Indiaman, the *Grantham* from Madras they captured off Hout Bay on 4 January in company, and wished to sell some of her cargo at the Cape.²⁵⁸ In line with the peace agreements between the Netherlands and Britain (in 1667 and 1674) vessels of one of the countries captured by a third state, could not be sold in a port belonging to either of the countries. Hence Tulbagh prohibited the French from selling anything from the *Grantham* at the Cape and requested them to take the ship along, when they depart.²⁵⁹ On 15 January three more French warships, *L'Achille* (64) and two frigates (*Le Zéphyr* and *L'Irène*) arrived from Brest.²⁶⁰ The Captain of *L'Achille* asked the Cape to provide it with a heavy anchor and round wood for spars, which was done.²⁶¹ There was now a considerable French naval presence at the Cape and they were not only replenished, but also acquired provisions and material to maintain the warships.

Discussions on defence matters now became rather more serious. It is interesting to note that despite the fierce rivalry with the British, Britain was not seen as the enemy, but the Dutch were worried about a war with France: "tussen onse Republicq en de kroon van Vrankrijk ... een openbaaren oorlog ... ontstaan..."²⁶² The astonishing expansion of the British Empire in the East, which resulted in British commercial and naval dominance, was not so evident at the time. Also, it is common to prepare for a previous war, and as the Dutch fought against France in the previous war, it was still the mindset of Council of Policy.

Tulbagh wanted the Cape to be better prepared. The arrival of the French clearly showed that the defence of the Cape was not as efficient as it should be. It was necessary to improve the signal system so that those in the country districts could arrive at the Cape as soon

²⁵⁶ CA VC28, Dagverhaal, 29/12/1758.

²⁵⁷ C136, Resolutiën, 30/12/1758, pp.444-50, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005); and CA VC28, Dagverhaal der voornaamste zaaken, 30/12/1758.

²⁵⁸ CA VC28, Dagregister der voornaamste zaaken, 6/1/1759, 7/1/1759 and 9/1/1759.

²⁵⁹ CA C137, Resolutiën, 8/1/1759, pp.72-4.

²⁶⁰ CA VC28, Dagregister der voornaamste zaaken, 15/1/1759 and 16/1/1759.

²⁶¹ CA C137, Resolutiën, 23/1/1759, p.92.

²⁶² C137, Resolutiën, 14/8/1759, pp.288-321, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

as possible²⁶³ and a plan was made to evacuate the women and children to a place of safety (not specified) in case of a direct attack on Cape Town. The militia base was also broadened to include all Khoi workers on farms and capable of handling firearms, to also adhere to a call-up.²⁶⁴ Also, all redoubts and batteries, guns, gun carriages, equipment and ammunition had to be regularly checked and maintained. As some batteries had no commanders and others had insufficient gun crews, Lieutenant-Colonel Isaacq Meinertzhagen had to draw up a new defence plan that stipulated all combat stations.²⁶⁵

Meinertzhagen presented his plan on the deployment of defenders on the fortifications in an emergency to the Council of Policy on 4 September 1759. It provides a good idea of how the defence was arranged at the time. The artillerists were divided between the various fortifications while other VOC officials (sailors, artisans and minor officials) and the militia were allocated their specific stations. The Castle was under the command of the Independent Fiscal with one artillery NCO, six artillerists, some of the sailors and the *Pennisten Corps*.²⁶⁶ The rest of the allocations were as follows: The *Equipagemeester* was in command of the *Chavonnes Battery* and 's Heer Hendriks Kinderen and had an artillery NCO, two artillerists and some sailors to assist. The *Couvre face Imhoff* was under the command of the Artillery Lieutenant with an NCO, two artillerymen, sailors and militiamen in his troop. On the Sea Lines an *Opperstuurman* was in command of the *Elisabeth Battery*, with one artillery NCO, two artillerymen and militiamen; the *Helena Battery* was under the control of an artillery NCO with another NCO and two artillerists; and the *Tulbagh Battery* had a militia officer as commander, with an artillery NCO, one artilleryman and militiamen. Finally the Military Engineer was in command of *Fort de Knokke* with an artilleryman and militia, while the *Nieuwe Battery* was under the command of the Surveyor with one artillery NCO and militiamen.²⁶⁷ The men serving the guns were also issued with personal weapons for self defence in an emergency and interestingly enough they were not only issued with sabres and pistols, as expected, but also with *morgensterren* (a medieval style mace, with a ball with iron spikes).²⁶⁸

The field deployments according to Meinertzhagen's plan were as follows: The infantry battalion had to deploy behind the lines, from where they could quickly be moved to the point of enemy disembarkation. The burgher infantry had to deploy along the lines, while the burgher cavalry had to be ready for deployment anywhere along the front. The Chief of the armoury ("meester knecht van de wapenkamer") and a few militiamen served the field artillery.²⁶⁹

²⁶³ CA VC28, Dagregister der voornaamste zaaken, 14/8/1759.

²⁶⁴ S.M. Naude and P.J. Venter (eds), *Kaapse Plakkaatboek*, III, 7/9/1759, pp.25-6.

²⁶⁵ CA C137, Resolutiën, 14/8/1759, pp.312-3.

²⁶⁶ CA C137, Resolutiën, 4/9/1759, Nieuwe Schickingen tot defensie des Casteels en verdere Batterijen, gemaakt door den ondergeteekenden Lieutenant Collonel en hoofd der Militie, 4/9/1759, pp.332-4.

²⁶⁷ CA C137, Resolutiën, 4/9/1759, Nieuwe Schickingen tot defensie ..., pp.334-40.

²⁶⁸ CA C137, Resolutiën, 14/8/1759, p.312.

²⁶⁹ CA C137, Resolutiën, 4/9/1759, Nieuwe Schickingen tot defensie ..., pp.340-2.

On 13 February 1760 *Le Venguer* (64) arrived from Mauritius and requested permission for a squadron under the Chevalier De Palliere to replenish at the Cape, and to acquire additional provisions for Mauritius.²⁷⁰ The French also appointed an agent (one Monsieur Babinet) to manage the transactions and within days the French warships *Centaure*, *Vengeur*, *Fortune* and *St Louis* were at the Cape, with close to 3000 men onboard the ships alone. The Council of Policy emphasised that they had to remain vigilant and not rule out a surprise attack. As a result the watches on the batteries and redoubts were doubled and a detachment of 50 dragoons were called up to assist the Cape militia and patrol the coastline around Table Bay.²⁷¹

Meinertzhagen complained that his officers and men were overburdened when foreign warships visited. With only two Lieutenants, four Ensigns, and an Adjutant, he had too few officers as one officer was always on duty at the jetty and one was the officer of the day. Furthermore, his small garrison (only 350 soldiers) found it difficult to cope with the double watches. The battalion must therefore be increased to 400 men and the two most efficient Sergeants had to be promoted to Ensign.²⁷² Two additional Ensigns were appointed and by August 1762 Meinertzhagen had eight subalterns – two Lieutenants and six Ensigns. With news arriving in August 1762 of the British successes against France in India, the Council of Policy expected that more and stronger naval squadrons would frequent the Cape. As a result they resolved that they had to be ready to defend the Cape against a possible surprise attack.²⁷³

Despite Dutch neutrality, they suffered from substantial British interference with their seaborne trade. In the Indies, the VOC lost a number of its ships to privateers, while VOC possessions in India were attacked and even captured by both British and French forces. As a result, the Dutch undertook a number of expeditions and sought diplomatic alliances with local powers against the British.²⁷⁴ Robert Clive's victory at the Battle of Plassey in 1757 ensured British control of Bengal and was the first stage in the conquest of India.²⁷⁵ After the British captured the VOC post in Surat in 1759, the VOC prepared an expedition from Batavia aimed at recovering their position in Bengal. The VOC naval contingent was under the command of Commodore Middelmeer and had five, later eight, armed VOC ships (two with 50 guns). Ashore they had 2000 European soldiers bolstered by roughly 6000 indigenous troops, led by a French soldier of fortune, Roussel.²⁷⁶ The scheme was too ambitious. In the light of the strong British military presence it was beyond the power of the VOC in India and ended in a total fiasco. The

²⁷⁰ CA VC28, Dagverhaal der voornaamste zaaken, 13/2/1760; and C138, Resolutiën, 13/2/1760, pp.165-70, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁷¹ C138, Resolutiën, 26/2/1760, pp.171-90, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁷² *Ibid.*

²⁷³ C140, Resolutiën, 10/8/1762, pp.248-64, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁷⁴ IMH Milo163, Geschiedenis van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, betreffende een opgave en beschrijving van 13 belangrijke zeeslagen, 1595-1799, pp.53-4.

²⁷⁵ G. Parker, *The Military Revolution*, p.135; and J. Black, *Cambridge Illustrated Atlas*, pp.160-1.

²⁷⁶ F.S. Gaastra, 'War, Competition and Collaboration ...' in H.V. Bowen, M. Lincoln, and N. Rigby, *The World of the East India Company*, p.59.

Dutch ships were not ready for action, and were routed by the British ships,²⁷⁷ while ashore the Dutch also failed, suffering 400 casualties in two skirmishes (the so-called Battle of Bidara). The expedition's organisation was amateurish and badly executed. It showed poor tactical ability and leadership, while the British were better on all these accounts. The crucial question, however, was how could neutral Dutch forces make war against the British? The *Heeren XVII* tried hard to explain that the expedition was not launched against the British, but against Bengal leaders. The British returned the captured ships to the VOC, but the VOC had to pay damages and their trade in Bengal became dependent on British goodwill.²⁷⁸

This Dutch failure was significant and should not be underestimated. It showed that despite extensive VOC trade and shipping (still bigger than any other country), in military and naval terms the VOC was weak, with very little capacity to project their power against new, stronger opponents.²⁷⁹ A new power relationship now existed and Britain had become the most dominant European power in the East. The zealotry and competence with which the VOC had conducted its commercial and military affairs in the East, was something of the past. Due to its location, this would obviously impact on the Cape.

The Dutch-British competition in the East (specifically between 1755 and 1760) strained the relationship between Britain and the Dutch Republic. In total 52 French and 27 British ships visited the Cape during the war, many of them warships.²⁸⁰ At times French and British ships were at the Cape simultaneously, but serious problems did not occur in the Dutch roadstead, while in the surrounding seas, the war continued. During the visit of French and British squadrons to the Cape, their sailors and soldiers were not allowed to leave Cape Town or to frequent the streets after nine at night. Problems occurred with British men in Dutch service, as Commodore Thomas Lynn wanted them to report to him in January 1762, but Tulbagh flatly refused. Cape Town residents were also warned that they should not hide deserters from the ships at anchor or assist them in any way.²⁸¹

The decision of the Dutch Republic to remain neutral during the Seven Years War infuriated Britain and strained their subsequent relationship. France lost Canada as well as many possessions in India. Britain was now the largest naval power in the world. The greater effectiveness of the British Navy compared to other navies, such as the French and Dutch, was largely due to its extensive administrative system, enough cash, professional naval leadership and a political commitment by government to provide its navy with enough resources.²⁸²

²⁷⁷ IMH Milo163, *Geschiedenis van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, betreffende een opgave en beschrijving van 13 belangrijke zeeslagen, 1595-1799*, pp.54-5.

²⁷⁸ F.S. Gaastra, 'De VOC en EIC in Bengalen aan die vooravond van de Vierde Engelse Oorlog (1780-1784)', *Tijdschrift voor zeegegeschiedenis*, 20 (2001), p.24.

²⁷⁹ F.S. Gaastra, 'War, Competition and Collaboration ...' in H.V. Bowen, M. Lincoln, and N. Rigby, *The World of the East India Company*, p.60.

²⁸⁰ C. Beyers, *Die Kaapse Patriotte*, p.334.

²⁸¹ S.M. Naude and P.J. Venter (eds), *Kaapse Plakkaatboek*, III, Advertissement, 11/2/1762 and 11/3/1763, pp.35 and 48-9.

²⁸² J. Black, *Warfare in the Eighteenth Century*, p.139.

During the war Britain and France improved their bases on St Helena Island and Mauritius respectively, while both islands were also provisioned from the Cape. Economically the Peace of Paris, concluded in 1763, was a setback to the Cape, but as the next war showed, both France and Britain knew too well that the Cape was very important for maritime power projection to the East.

6. THE CAPE AND THE VOC AFTER THE SEVEN YEARS WAR

Tulbagh's very capable Secunde, Jan Willem Cloppenburg, was one of the few VOC officials of the day, on Cape matters in any case, that really understood the changing context of the late eighteenth century. In 1769, in his neat hand he set Cape affairs against the proper strategic background and thoroughly motivated his opinions in a manuscript. He expressed sadness with the fact that the VOC was only interested in profits, which inhibited the proper development of the Cape and its defence establishment. Before he came to the Cape, he considered it of very little value to the VOC, but he soon realised that such a view was indicative of a lack of understanding of maritime matters and the true value of the Cape. Cloppenburg stated that the Cape was so important to the VOC "... bij het behoud of missen van dien de Compagnie Staen of vallen moet". The main purpose of the VOC was to maintain its trading empire in the Indies. If an enemy of the Netherlands controlled the Cape in wartime, Dutch homebound ships would be easy prey, which would spell disaster: "De Caab verlooren de Compagnie verlooren".²⁸³

Various French and British visitors commented on the value of the Cape at the time. The well-known French navigator, Bougainville who visited the Cape at the end of his voyage around the world in 1769, emphasised the hospitality they received at the Cape, stating that they were "supplied with good food, wines and refreshments of every kind ...".²⁸⁴ Many British visitors to the Cape also commented on its value. Sir Joseph Banks gave an interesting account of the Cape, emphasising that the "industrious Dutch" provided all kinds of "European provisions" and were set on supporting ships. More important though, Banks stated that because of its convenience "... as a place of refreshment for ships sailing to and from India, it is perhaps visited by Europeans oftener than any other distant part of the globe".²⁸⁵

The legendary Captain James Cook (also a naval officer) considered the Cape as a crucial and efficient stop-over and stated that there were often British warships at anchor and always ships of various nationalities. In the Journal on his second voyage he expressed his delight with the quick delivery of provisions and the fact that they received fresh food and freshly baked bread on a daily basis. Cook, always concerned about the health of sailors, mentioned

²⁸³ CA VC95, Cloppenburg, Anotatien en Remarques op het Caabse Gouvernement, pp.i-ii, ix-xi and xxiv.

²⁸⁴ R. Lacour-Gayet, *A History of South Africa*, p.42.

²⁸⁵ J. Banks, *Journal of the right hon. Sir Joseph Banks during Captain Cook's first Voyage in H.M.S. Endeavour in 1768-71 ...*, pp.432-5.

that ships often arrived with many sick onboard, who were then hospitalised.²⁸⁶ Cook generally painted, caulked and repaired his ships at the Cape. On returning from his second voyage the *Resolution* and *Adventure* were understandably in a very bad condition and he struck the yards and topmasts to effect repairs. His only complaint was that he had to replace all the running rigging at an exorbitant price as the Dutch "... take a shameful advantage of the distress of foreigners".²⁸⁷ On his last visit to the Cape, Cook reported that his officers were very impressed with Stellenbosch, the organised agriculture they saw and the "industrious people that created such plenty" at the Cape.²⁸⁸ Cook was very impressed with the "good treatment which strangers meet with at the Cape of Good Hope ... and refreshments of all kinds are no where to be got in such abundance, we enjoyed some real repose, after the fatigues of a long voyage".²⁸⁹ Journal's like James Cook's were widely read in Georgian Britain and surely contributed towards bolstering perceptions on the value of the Cape.

British and French commercial and naval shipping frequented the Cape roadstead and the islands of Mauritius and St Helena depended on supplies from the Cape. Mauritius was developed as a base to sustain operations and when the French Compagnie de Indes was dissolved in 1769 their Eastern trade fell under the French Government. Immediately after the conclusion of the Peace of Paris, British shipping to the Cape soared, from eight ships in 1763 to twenty the following year. Though French interests in the East were still strong, most of the foreign ships that frequented the Cape were now British. For example, between 1763 and 1780, a total of 365 British and 325 French ships replenished at the Cape.²⁹⁰ With an expanding empire in India, British trade grew and in times of trouble, their concern would certainly be with the route channelling the rich trade from India.

Some visits by foreign ships were problematic. When the British warship *HMS Panther*, the *Weymouth* and *Seaford* visited the Cape in the beginning of 1765, between twenty and thirty VOC soldiers deserted to the *Panther*. The Cape authorities immediately stopped provisioning the British ships, until the British commander, Richard Collins, promised to return the soldiers.²⁹¹ On 30 March after a very trying passage, the Spanish warship *La Venus* (Captain De Langara y Huarte) on its way to Manila made an emergency stop at the Cape for water, provisions and wood for masts and spars. The Cape authorities had received orders from the VOC not to admit and supply Spanish ships, in April 1770, and had refused earlier to provision to the Spanish frigate, *Astrea*. Major Van Prehn, and a number of other officials had to inform the Spanish Captain that in accordance with the agreements of Munster and Utrecht, they were not

²⁸⁶ J. Cook, *A Voyage towards the South Pole and Round the World performed in His Majesty's Ships the Resolution and Adventure in the years 1772-75*, Volume I, pp.17-8.

²⁸⁷ J. Cook, *A Voyage towards the South Pole and round the World ...*, Volume II, p.265.

²⁸⁸ J. Cook, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean undertaken by the Command of his Majesty for making discoveries ...*, Volume I, pp.42-3.

²⁸⁹ J. Cook, *A voyage towards the South Pole and round the World ...*, II, pp.264-5.

²⁹⁰ C. Beyers, *Die Kaapse Patriotte*, pp.334-5.

²⁹¹ C143, Resolutiën, 22/1/1765, pp.83-126, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

allowed to sail around the Cape to the East, and that they could not stay at the Cape. However, as they clearly experienced an emergency, they would be supplied with firewood and water.²⁹² Captain De Langara y Huarte was very perturbed about the situation and wrote to the Governor that Spain was at peace with the Netherlands and showed great hospitality to Dutch ships. As they did not have enough provisions onboard to continue, he would report the matter to the Spanish Crown. The Council stuck to its decision not to supply the ship.²⁹³

Cloppenburg had high regard for Tulbagh referring to him as “een der deftigste Regenten”, but Tulbagh had become old and as a result of more than fifty years service, his will to affect change did not really exist anymore.²⁹⁴ Of these two capable men, Cloppenburg was the first to die on 30 May 1770. When Tulbagh died on 11 August 1771, the Council of Policy elected the Independent Fiscal and Acting Secunde, Van Plettenberg, to hold the seat of Government until a decision was made by the *Heeren XVII*.²⁹⁵ Joachim Ammemma Baron van Plettenberg (born in 1739) was educated as a lawyer and had very little experience. He was appointed in Batavia in 1764 and took over as Independent Fiscal at the Cape in 1767. He became Acting Secunde after Cloppenburg's death and Acting Governor at the age of 32. Baron Pieter van Reede van Oudtshoorn was appointed as Secunde, but before he left the Netherlands news was received of Tulbagh's passing and he was appointed as Governor with Van Plettenberg as Secunde. On 23 January 1773 Van Oudtshoorn died at sea while on his way to the Cape. Van Plettenberg was subsequently appointed Governor and ceremoniously installed on 18 May 1774.²⁹⁶

Van Plettenberg had a difficult task. Economically the Cape was sliding into a depression, and the farmers could not sell their surplus produce. Militarily the defensive capability of the Cape was poor and neglected. Defence needed serious consideration, but with a VOC struggling to keep its head above water, he would receive little assistance in solving the economic and defence problems of the Cape.

The history of the Dutch settlement at the Cape, is marked by constant strife between the free burghers and the VOC and this struggle now became more intense. The opposition against the VOC was essentially caused by the economic resentment over its monopoly of the importing and exporting market and agricultural produce. The VOC's need for provisions was quite static due to the size of its fleets and the VOC kept the prices of imports high and that of local produce low. This discouraged higher production and expansion.²⁹⁷ The discontent amongst the Cape burghers and the farmers of the interior were also influenced by political factors. Much resentment existed due to the exclusion of local figures on the governing Council of Policy, which meant that the ideas of the American Revolution found fertile breeding ground.

²⁹² C150, Resolutiën, 31/3/1772, pp.188-222, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁹³ C150, Resolutiën, 11/4/1772, pp.223-52, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁹⁴ CA VC95, Cloppenburg, Anotatien en Remarques op het Caabse Gouvernement, pp.xxv.

²⁹⁵ C149, Resolutiën, 12/8/1771, pp.222-31, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁹⁶ C.V.E. Wahl, *Die Administrasie van die Kaap onder Goewerneur Van Plettenberg*, pp.5-7.

The setting of these grievances against such a wider background became evident in the protest of *Kaapse Patriotte* of 1778. As they campaigned for the improvement of their conditions (seeking political rights and economic freedom for the burghers) they felt their destiny narrowly linked to the Cape, while becoming more antagonistic towards the VOC government. In October 1779 a burgher deputation of four members went to the Netherlands to present a petition to the VOC.²⁹⁸

In the meantime the VOC's struggle with keeping its books balanced, and ensuring that its valuable cargoes reach Europe, continued. In a very interesting memorandum directed to the Stadtholder and ostensibly written by Captain R.J. Gordon in 1775, the reasons for the many deaths on VOC ships were discussed. VOC ships often had poor multi-national crews "slegstes van verscheiden natien" and were overcrowded. They had to carry fewer crewmembers and more attention had to be paid to improve the design of the ships and its rigging to make them lighter and faster, like the French and British ships. The memorandum contained much information and criticism on the treatment of the sick onboard. Reference is also made to the Journal of Captain Cook and his findings on crew health.²⁹⁹ The future Captain at the Cape was clearly someone with an intellectual and analytical approach.

As in the past the scourge of pirates and the threat of wars remained. Captains of VOC ships were constantly warned to keep their ships in a fighting condition. They had to exercise their crews in fighting the ship and the Admiral of the return fleet had to ensure that ships were well-equipped for defence and also carried weapons for hand-to-hand fighting. Orders were regularly issued that provided detail on the route ships had to take and where they had to meet the Dutch warships that escorted them back to the Netherlands.³⁰⁰ Some of the Dutch Admiralties were, however, finding it difficult to perform their convoy obligations. For example, in 1773, 1776 and 1778 the Admiralty of Zeeland notified the VOC that they could not provide the escort frigate they had to make available. In lieu they provided a financial contribution to the VOC to fund an escort vessel.³⁰¹ This is a clear indication of the degeneration of the Dutch Navy and the fact that they were not ready for war. If difficulties existed with escorting valuable cargo ships in home waters in peacetime, how were they to defend State and Empire in wartime?

When Tulbagh was warned in 1771 that war might break out between Britain, France and Spain, he was worried about the weak defensive capabilities of the Cape. On 15 April

²⁹⁷ J.I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, p.1061.

²⁹⁸ C. Beyers, *Die Kaapse Patriotte*, pp.25-31 and 102-8.

²⁹⁹ NAN 1.01.50 – 1185. Aanmerkingen omtrent de Ziekten op de Hollandsche Oostindische Schepen. No signature and no date, but written on the back (by the Stadtholder?): "Deze Memorie hebbe ik van den Capitein Gordon in Augustus 1775 ontvangen en Copie daarvan aan den Advocaat Van der Hoop".

³⁰⁰ NAN VOC4826, Zeilaas-Ordre van Batavia over Cabo de Bona Esperance naar het Patria in October en November, 25/8/1769; and VOC4826, Instructie voor de retourschepen, 14/9/1769.

³⁰¹ NAN VOC11382, Extract uijtde Notülen van den Raad ter Admiraliteyt in Zeeland, 27/3/1773, 6/4/1776 and 23/3/1778.

1771, shortly before his death, he wrote to the *Heeren XVII* that the Cape was practically defenceless and a strong enemy would easily subdue its weak garrison and its poor defences with its light and insufficient guns.³⁰² As Cloppenburg had emphasised two years earlier, the VOC were often told that the military establishment at the Cape was too small, but they were not really interested in improving it, because it was too expensive and they were not always convinced of the value of the Cape. Many hoped that it might be possible for ships to make the voyage without stopping over at the Cape.³⁰³

As a result of Tulbagh's concern the *Heeren XVII* requested Van Plettenberg to provide them with an inventory of the quantity, quality and calibre of the guns at the Cape.³⁰⁴ Van Plettenberg ordered Van Prehn to prepare a comprehensive reply. Van Prehn indicated that the Cape had 122 guns on the Castle and the various batteries around Table Bay. But the picture was far from rosy, many guns were written off ("onbruikbaar") while others were rusted and dangerous to use ("met gallen beset ... selfs gevaarlijk te gebruiken zijn"). Out of a total of 122 guns, 46 were not to be used. Van Prehn thought they also needed a further 30 heavy guns for the Castle, the *Couvre face Imhoff* and the other batteries as an enemy would most likely launch a direct attack on the Castle.³⁰⁵ In 1774 the *Heeren XVII* notified the Cape that 36 guns would be sent in 1776 for the new battery (the future *Amsterdam Battery*).³⁰⁶

It would be unfair to say that the Cape authorities did nothing in Van Plettenberg's time to emphasise the inadequacies of the Cape defences. They requested more soldiers, artillerymen and equipment, but such requests were often part of reports on the general state of affairs at the Cape instead of strong-worded individual pleas (such as Cloppenburg's) that made the impossibility of defending the Cape against a concerted attack clear. As far as the militia was concerned, the records indicate a chronic shortage of gunpowder, flints (for the flint-lock muskets) and lead for bullets. The militia was also often requested to conserve such articles. Fortifications were generally in a poor state, in need of an upgrade, and despite Tulbagh and Cloppenburg's requests for reinforcements, the military establishment did not become bigger as the garrison was maintained with roughly 460 infantrymen and 30 artillerymen. However, due to an urgent secret request from the High Council of the Indies to relieve their critical military situation (specifically in Ternate and Macassar) 200 fully equipped soldiers were despatched from the Cape to reinforce Batavia in February 1778. It posed some problems to the Cape, as

³⁰² CA C1848, Uitgaande Secreete Brieven, Tulbagh – *Heeren XVII*, 20/4/1771, pp.493-7.

³⁰³ CA VC95, Cloppenburg, Anotatien en Remarques op het Caabse Gouvernement, pp.ix-xiii.

³⁰⁴ CA C642, Inkomende Secreete Brieven, Van Gecommitteerde Bewindhebbers en Gemagtigden van de Vergadering van 17ne tot Secreete Zaaken, 7/11/1771, pp.37-8.

³⁰⁵ CA C1850, Uitgaande Secreete Brieven, Van Plettenberg – *Heeren XVII*, 7/5/1773, pp.9-20.

³⁰⁶ C.V.E. Wahl, Die Administrasie van die Kaap onder Goewerneur Van Plettenberg, p.13.

they also had a shortage of soldiers, but they complied. They then tried to persuade soldiers on their way back to the Netherlands to prolong their service for more money – only six agreed.³⁰⁷

In 1775 a rebellion against British authority broke out in the American colonies and on 4 July 1776 the American colonists declared their independence from Britain. Now, they were not rebellious British subjects, but citizens of a sovereign country repelling a British invader. France initially supported the rebellion secretly, recognised the United States as a sovereign nation and intervened in February 1778, by despatching a fleet to America. At the beginning of 1779 both France and Spain had declared war on Britain. The British Ambassador in The Hague reminded the Dutch about their commitments in terms of the 1678 agreement, but the Dutch preferred to stay neutral – an act the British resented. Sentiments in the Netherlands were apparently more pro-American than pro-British, probably because of political support for American ideals, but also as a result of the commercial rivalry with Britain.³⁰⁸

It was not only the defences of the Cape that was in a bad state as the defence of the Dutch Republic was also severely neglected and both its army and navy needed modernisation. The Stadtholder, Willem V, and his government knew that Dutch prosperity was closely linked to maritime trade and that the navy was inadequate to provide maritime security and protect Dutch colonies and commerce. Nothing came of earlier plans (1771) to build 24 warships and by 1777, with war clouds looming, things looked bad. The Dutch had 66 warships in total of which 26 were ships of the line (but with an average age of 30 to 40 years most were unserviceable), while the rest of the vessels were armed with less than 44 guns. In comparison Britain had a 295 ship navy and the French had 216 warships on paper, which in terms of operational battleship and cruiser strengths it was probably about two-thirds of the total. The Stadtholder called the state of the navy “deplorabel”, and it was eventually decided to equip additional warships.³⁰⁹

By the 1770's the Dutch Republic was weakened by sharp political disagreement and was in steep decline. Though it still possessed valuable assets such as its colonial empire and its shipping, these were vulnerable to growing British imperialism. Tension was also rising between the Dutch and the British as Britain suspected many Dutch of supporting American rebels with supplies via the West Indies and they increased the sporadic boarding and seizure of Dutch ships that supposedly carried contraband.³¹⁰ It was bound to impact negatively on the Dutch economy and merchants and ship-owners complained, the States-General formally protested to King George III and decided to increase its convoy's efforts as much as possible.³¹¹

³⁰⁷ See K.M. Jeffreys (ed), *Kaapsche Archiefstukken 1778*, Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Governor General and Council of India, 16/2/1778, p.315; Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Heeren XVII, 2/3/1778, p.317; Resolutiën, 2/2/1778, pp.20-2; and Resolutiën, 3/2/1778, pp.23-4. C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire*, p.186.

³⁰⁸ A.R. Kravenhoff van de Leur, *Militair-historische schetsen: over de noodzakelijkheid van de kennis der krijgsgeschiedenis. Land- en zeemacht in de 18e eeuw*, pp.40, 42 and 102. For warship statistics see also R. Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare*, pp.245 and 254.

³¹⁰ J.I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, pp.1095-6.

³¹¹ NAN 1.01.50 – 132, Extract uyt het Register der Resolutien van de Hoog Mogende Heren Staten Generaal der Verenigde Nederlanden, 19/11/1778.

A strong anti-British feeling existed in the Republic as the Dutch felt that their colonial interests and trading system was being frustrated by British sea power.

The British on the other hand was just as concerned about their trade. Even before war between France and Britain broke out, they expressed concern about the security of their homebound East Indiamen. The First Lord of the Admiralty Board, Lord Sandwich, wished to increase convoy protection and King George III and the Prime Minister (Lord North) supported the idea.³¹² By 1777 the Royal Navy awaited homeward-bound convoys at St Helena or the Cape and escorted them back to Britain.³¹³ The Cape was useful to the British as their convoys often assembled here and it was not uncommon for British warships to wait at the Cape for the East Indiamen³¹⁴ – something they highly valued as the war escalated.

7. CONCLUSION

The creation of the VOC and other chartered companies was typical of the age of mercantilism, as a fusion took place between the objectives of the state and the objectives of big trading companies, or rather trading empires. The power of the state was indirectly projected by the tools of trade and war which the trading company possessed. Strong trade was big business; it implied money and wealth, which equated power.

During the seventeenth century the VOC was in commercial and military terms an unassailable power in the East. The eighteenth century, however, saw the decline of both the Dutch Republic and the VOC. In France and Britain they faced strong maritime competitors, but it was Britain that became a prominent power in the East as the lines between the EEIC and the British State blurred and the British started to force their competitors from the Indian subcontinent during the Seven Years War. The events in Bengal in 1759 illustrated that the VOC power in the East was much weaker than they thought. Despite the fact that more East Indiamen still sailed from the Netherlands and returned richly laden than from any other country, Dutch military and naval power had fundamentally weakened. Outside the Indonesian Archipelago or Ceylon, the VOC could not achieve its goals with military force anymore.³¹⁵

With the tide of war in the Indian Ocean turning against the French during the Seven Years War and Mauritius in no position to maintain large military forces, assistance from the Cape became crucial to the French war effort in India and the Indian Ocean. After the war it

³¹² G.R. Barnes and J.H. Owen (eds), *The Private Papers of John, Earl of Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty, 1771-1782*, Volume I, North – Sandwich, 9/1/1776 and George III – Sandwich, 11/1/1776, p.103.

³¹³ G.R. Barnes and J.H. Owen (eds), *The Private Papers of John, Earl of Sandwich*, I, Memorandum, Vice Admiral Sir Hugh Palliser, 25/8/1777 as well as Palliser – Sandwich, 29/9/1777, p.249.

³¹⁴ K.M. Jeffreys (ed), *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1778*, Resolutiën, 24/1/1778, pp.17-8 and Dagregister, 8/10/1778 and 10/10/1778, pp.209-10.

³¹⁵ F.S. Gaastra, 'War, Competition and Collaboration ...' in H.V. Bowen, M. Lincoln, and N. Rigby, *The World of the East India Company*, p.60.

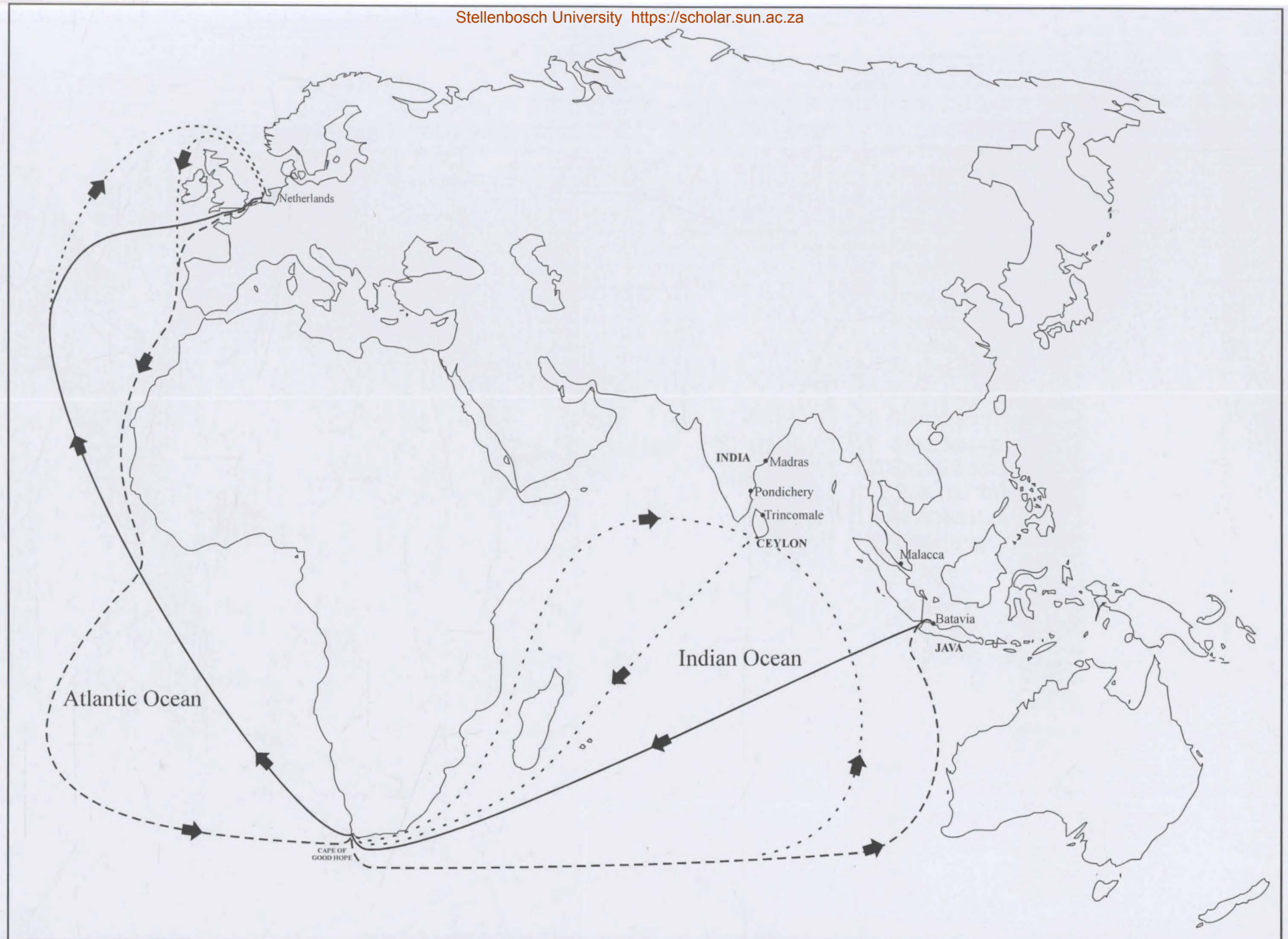
was obvious that the Cape had gained strategic value. Both France and Britain knew it was crucial to colonial power in the East and control of the Cape would provide a major advantage over an opponent in any future war.

But did the VOC realise that the Cape had become more than just a refreshment station? It seems not. Though individuals like Cloppenburg emphasised the value of the Cape to the VOC and pleaded for its defence establishment to be placed on a more secure footing, nothing came of it. The defence organisation at the Cape was not substantially improved in this period, despite the rapidly changing environment and the rising influence of Britain. In fact, decades before the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War broke out it was evident that the Cape would not be able to properly defend itself against a concerted attack by one of the maritime competitors of the VOC.

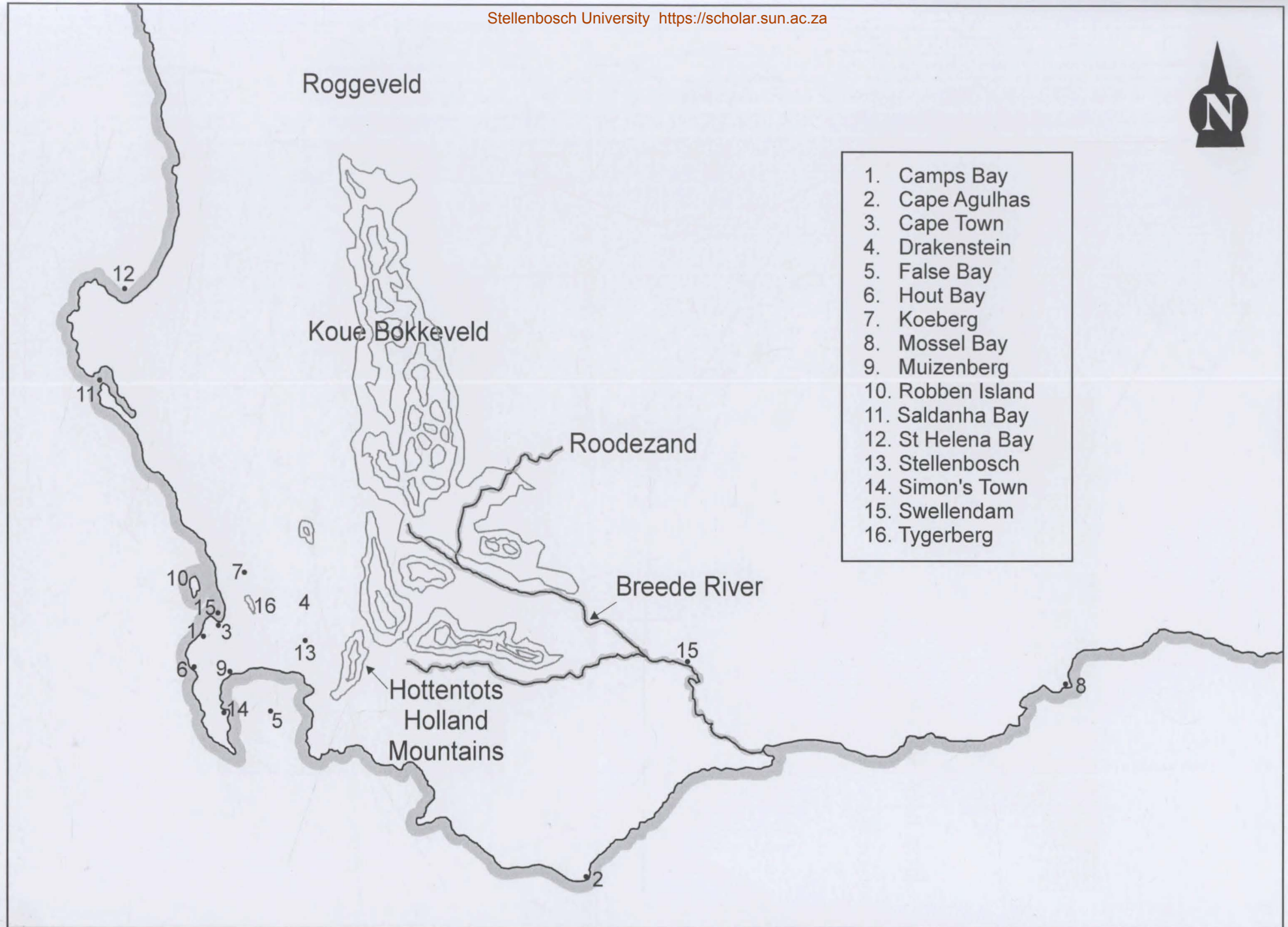
A defensive organisation existed at the Cape that relied mostly on a system of fortifications around Table Bay, a regular infantry battalion, a few artillerymen and militia forces. However, herein was also its main weakness: to defend territory against maritime power projection a naval ability was essential, but there was none. Fortifications were very important for defence and was in line with the Dutch way of thinking as well as with the VOC approach, but the fortifications at the Cape were inadequate and not well enough armed and maintained, which made a proper defence difficult. If fortifications were constructed in the right way, they were very expensive. This was probably the single most important reason why sufficient permanent fortifications were not created at the Cape.³¹⁶ Finally, the standing military force at the Cape was simply too small. To think of warding off a concerted attack by a naval task force and regular forces with a small group of regular soldiers and a motley band of militiamen, was militarily risqué.

It is evident then, that due to its location and the increasing competition for empire in the East, the Cape acquired significant strategic value. Though the VOC had placed a premium on the defence of the Cape, by 1778 its defences was neglected and severely lacking, while the Cape was essentially incapable of holding its own in an attack by one of the maritime empires of the day. Despite British successes in the Seven Years War, the issue between France and Britain was not yet resolved. As Britain controlled much of North America and were well entrenched in India, the ongoing Franco-British struggle would have to be settled at sea and the struggle would continue during the American War of Independence. This meant that due to its location the Cape had much significance, and as will be discussed in the next chapter, it was set to be pulled into this maelstrom.

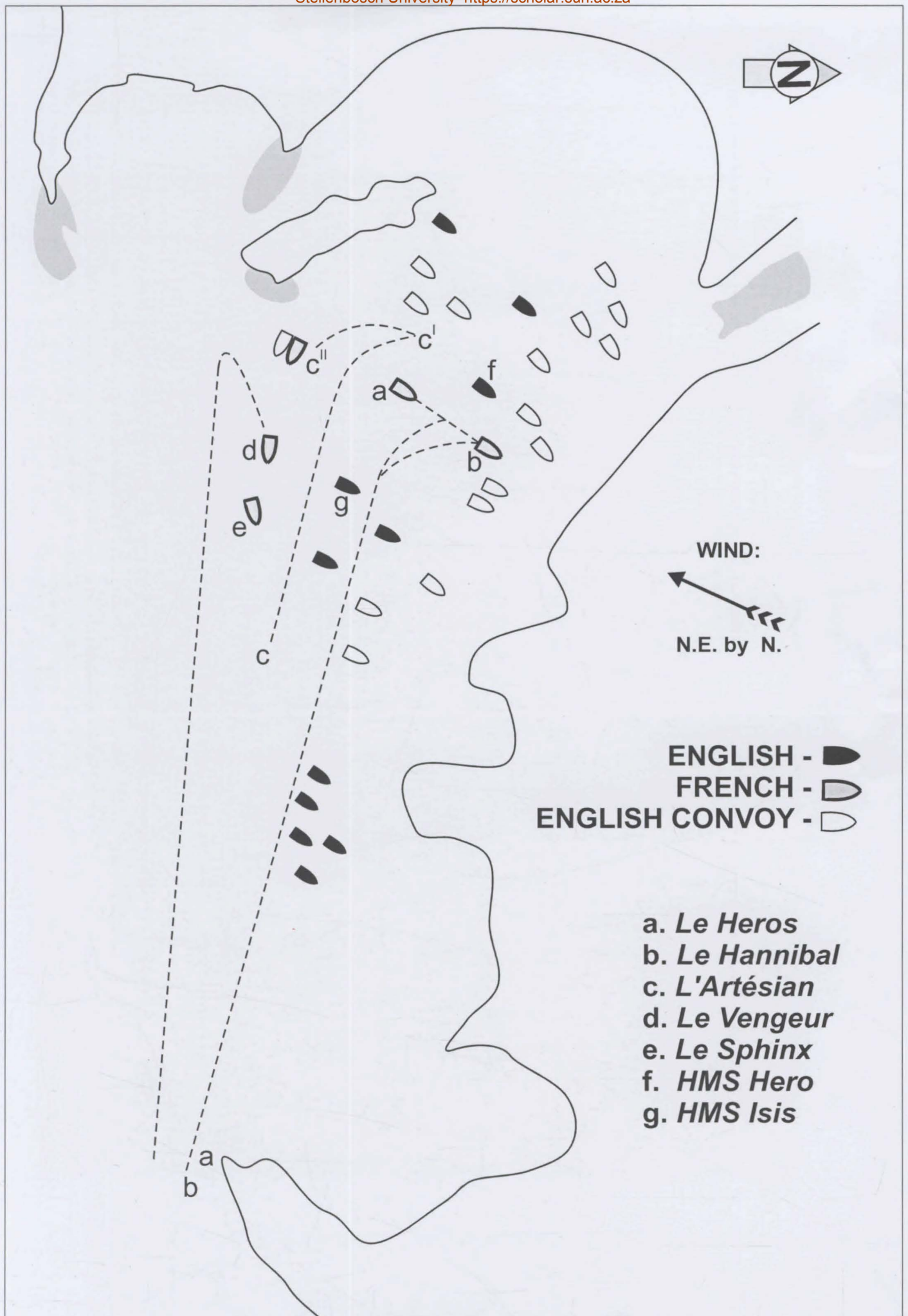
³¹⁶CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, pp.53-4.



1. Shipping routes to and from the East in the age of sail

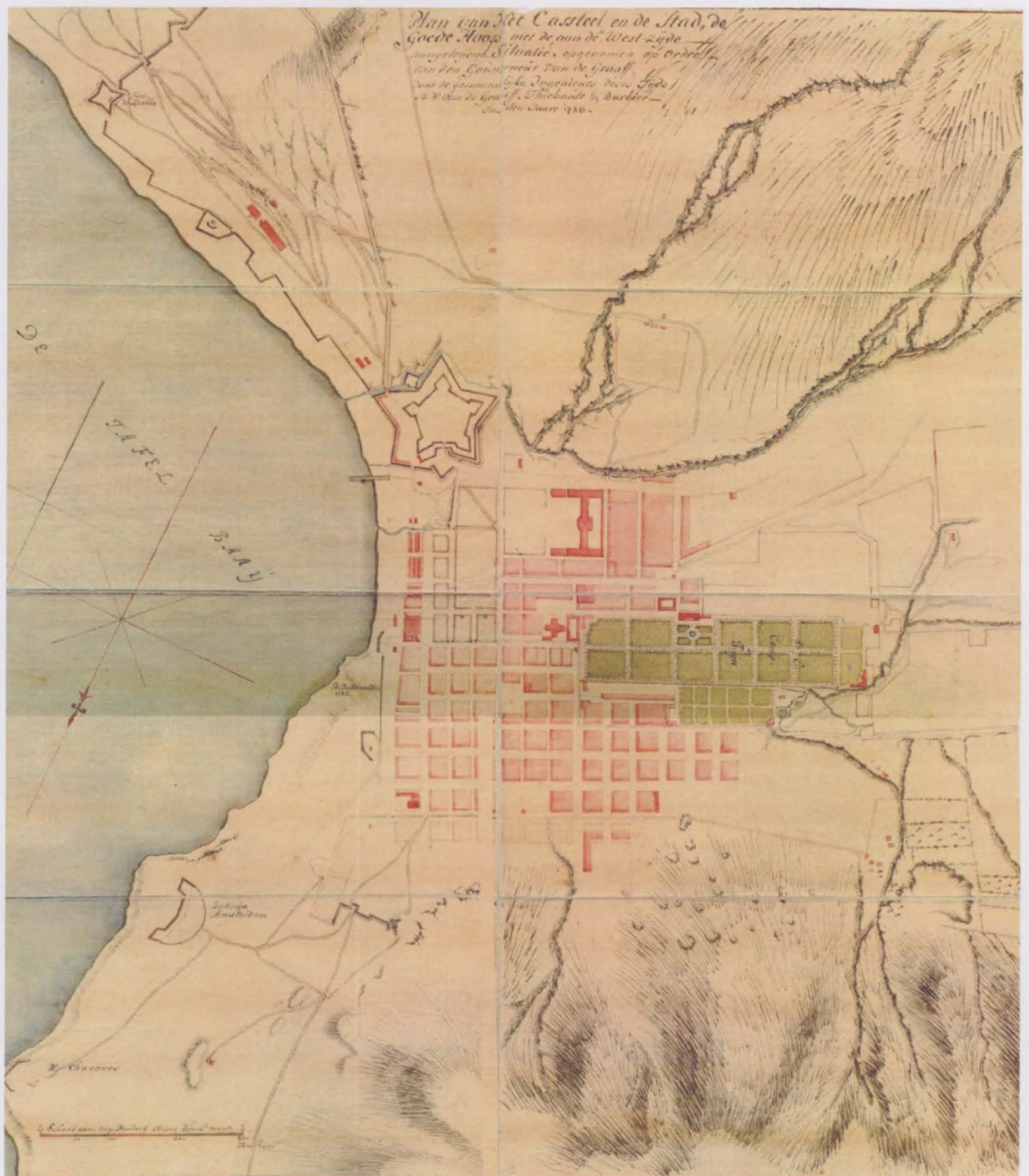


2. The Cape and Surrounds in the late eighteenth century



3. The action at Porto Praya, 16 April 1781

4. Capture of VOC Ships in Saldanha Bay, 21 July 1781



5. Plan of Cape Town and the Castle, 1786



6. Vice Admiral Pierre Andre de Suffren Saint Tropez

7. French Corvette, circa 1790



8. Colonel Robert Jacob Gordon

PART II
THE VALUE OF A GOOD ALLY:
DEFENCE OF THE CAPE DURING THE FOURTH ANGLO-
DUTCH WAR, 1780 - 1784

*Chapter 3***OUTBREAK OF WAR AND THE DEFENCE OF THE CAPE, 1778 - 1781****1. INTRODUCTION**

It is evident from events at the Cape during the American War of Independence and the ensuing Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, that the history of the Cape could not be separated from international affairs and the wars between the maritime empires of the day. Immediately after the outbreak of the American War of Independence it geographically spread from the North Atlantic to the East, and the location of the Cape became strategically important to the belligerents. The French and British both had much use of the Cape while the Dutch stayed neutral. Though the Dutch wished to maintain their neutrality, due to their naval, military and economic regression, they were systematically pulled into the war. Even before the war commenced, the poor defensive situation of the Dutch Republic and the VOC (and with it the Cape) was glaringly obvious. In the end the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War became the “genadeslag voor de VOC”, as the Dutch historian Milo so aptly described it.¹

The defence of the Cape during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War was a complex international affair, specifically as the Cape was a part of the greater Franco-British confrontation and their struggle for naval supremacy. The Cape was important to the defence of the crucial eastern empires, because of its value as a refreshment post and its role as a base. It was ideal for the projection of power to the East and was crucial from a logistic point of view to the whole French war-effort in the Indian Ocean. To the Dutch the French would prove to be a loyal ally, essential for the preservation of VOC possessions.

The Dutch perspective of the Cape of Good Hope at the time (in 1782) was as follows: “De Kaap de Goede Hoop is wel niet een der voordeeligste, maar nochtans eene der nuttigste Bezittingen voor den Handel en Zeevaart der Maatschappye ... Het hoofdoogmerk deezer Volksplantinge is eene verversching en rustplaats voor de schepen der Maatschappye ... indien de Compagnie zodanig eene ververschingsplaats niet had, zouden de reizen haarer schepen

¹ IMH Milo 163, Geschiedenis van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, betreffende een opgave en beschrijving van 13 belangrijke zeeslagen, 1595-1799, p.56.

thans byna ondoenlyk zyn".² These arguments were correct as it emphasised the value of the Cape as a place of refreshments and its utility for the recuperation of sailors and soldiers. However, it was lacking, as it was analogous to the views of a century earlier. It is as if no understanding existed of the enormous strategic value the Cape had suddenly gained. The poor defensive situation of the Cape was partly due to an inability or unwillingness amongst the ruling Dutch elite and the management of the VOC to really grasp the changing strategic environment and allocate proper resources to its defence.

The objective of this chapter is to focus on the outbreak of the war and the way in which the Cape organised its defence immediately after receiving news of the war. To achieve this objective the international situation, the impact of the American War of Independence on the Cape and the events leading up to the outbreak of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War will be explained. In addition the military organisation at the Cape before and after the outbreak of the war will be discussed with special emphasis to available forces, measures taken and, foremost from the VOC perspective, the defence of the valuable shipping. Though reference will be made to French support, Dutch-French diplomacy and French military reinforcements will be discussed in the next two chapters.

2. THE AMERICAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE AND THE VALUE OF THE CAPE TO THE BELLIGERENTS

During the Seven Years War and the American War of Independence, Britain engaged both France and Spain in a transoceanic conflict, while the Netherlands stayed neutral. The conflict mostly took place in North America and the Caribbean, but during both wars, hostilities soon spread to India and the Indian Ocean. As a result the Cape became important to the war effort of the two main belligerents (France and Britain) in what essentially became a "world war". Why did a war between Britain and her rebellious subjects in North America therefore develop into a war between Britain and France in the Indian Seas, with the Cape of Good Hope as a crucial joint? Trade was the connection. India was a source of great profits and a war between trading rivals gave merchants the opportunity, or excuse, to appropriate a greater share of the trade and to brush aside competitors.

In naval terms the tables were somewhat turned. Britain was the principle naval power at the end of the Seven Years War, but she had allowed her navy to decay somewhat, while wise

² IMH Anonymous, *Batavia, De Hoofdstad van Neerlands O. Indien ...*, Zevende Boek. Over den

French policies had created a newer more effective navy. Also, France was not burdened with an expensive war on the European continent and could put much more effort into her navy. Combined France and Spain had a 25% quantitative superiority in warships over Britain, which made the British position more difficult than in the Seven Years War and impossible for Britain to command the sea.³ British naval commitments were many and difficult to fulfil. One of the problems with British naval operations at the beginning of the war was the ministerial delays in getting a sufficient navy operational, as Lord Sandwich (First Lord of the Admiralty Board) stated, "if our equipment had begun sooner ...".⁴

Initially the British fared badly. One of the reasons why they lost their American colonies was because the French were able to check them at sea at the critical moment. The French Admiral, Comte François de Grasse, cooperated with General George Washington and the Comte Jean de Rochambeau to deny the British command of the sea along the American coast. This made a concentration against the British at Yorktown possible in September 1781. Admiral Graves was unable to defeat the French fleet and force his way into Chesapeake Bay to reinforce the British from the sea, which forced the British Commander, General Cornwallis, to surrender on 19 October 1781.⁵ Later, after the British victory over the French at the Battle of the Saints (in April 1782) the situation in the Atlantic changed, but it was too late to salvage the British hold on her North American colonies.

Yorktown was not unique. Sea power played an important role in the war, as General Sir John Bugoyne wrote in Madras in 1782, "It is by the sea only we can be supplied".⁶ This held true for the other belligerents, as the situation along the Indian peninsula, Ceylon and the Cape demonstrated. At Quebec (besieged in 1776) and Gibraltar (besieged in 1779) British forces were relieved by a British fleet, while positions not relieved by a fleet (such as Minorca in 1782) were lost. The Cape was saved from British conquest by the timely arrival of a relieving French fleet, while the effective use of a strong naval force made it possible for the French to recapture some of the possessions the Dutch lost, while the French stronghold in the Indian Ocean, Mauritius, had to be supplied from the sea.

Though the Dutch Republic preferred to stay neutral, due to the situation at sea the rift between the British and the Dutch became greater as the war progressed. The Dutch believed

Koophandel der Hollandsche Compagnie in de Indien, 1782, pp.120 and 127.

³ J. Black, *Warfare in the Eighteenth Century*, pp.100 and 139.

⁴ H.W. Richmond, *Statesmen and Sea Power*, p.151.

⁵ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power*, pp.387-90; and R. Harding, *Sea Power and Naval Warfare*, p.246.

⁶ J. Black, *Warfare in the Eighteenth Century*, pp.123-4.

that as a neutral state, they could trade with whom they wanted to (France, Britain, or the United States) under the law of nations. Britain objected, stating that on the basis of the 1678 Agreement the Dutch should support them. They also complained about Dutch support to the American colonies as American privateers, like John Paul Jones, even brought captured British prizes into Dutch harbours. Many Dutch ships which were detained on the grounds that they carried contraband goods, simply traded with France, or carried French property. The Dutch bitterly complained "and frequently with great justice of the arrogant, lawless, and violent manner in which England exercised the right to search".⁷ By 1779 as the Dutch organised more convoys for greater protection against random British searches or seizing, the potential for a British-Dutch conflict became greater.⁸

In May 1779 the Council of Policy asked the *Heeren XVII* how they should act in case a ship of the newly declared United States of America visited the Cape and a British ship tried to capture it at the Cape. After the Stadtholder and some ministers discussed the matter, Van Plettenberg was ordered not to show American ships any mark of respect or to take any actions that might be construed as recognition of American independence. However, the VOC had to enforce its authority and act against anyone that threatened the peace at anchorages under the protection of its guns.⁹

From 1778 onwards the war related traffic to the East increased, and since the Dutch Republic was neutral it included warships, convoys and troopships of the belligerents. During 1778 two British, three French and two Spanish warships visited the Cape. The British Royal Navy Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) in the East Indies, Rear Admiral Sir Edward Hughes, arrived at the Cape in January to await a number of British East Indiamen he had to convoy back to Europe.¹⁰ When war commenced the Cape became a suitable convoy assembly point for the British, as it was the link to the Atlantic and had ample provisions (something St Helena Island did not have). When the French frigate *Le Pourvoyeuse* (38) under the command of Captain Chevalier De St Orens arrived in Table Bay on 8 March 1778, the Castle was not saluted. De St Orens was told that his ship would receive no provisions (besides water and firewood) if he did

⁷ W.E.H. Lecky, *A History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, Volume V, p.69.

⁸ See for example NAN VOC4292, Verklaringen der officieren van de schepen 't Loo en de Vr Antonetta Conradina wegens vijandelijke rencontres met eenige engelsche kaperschepen, 24/12/1779, pp.31-6.

⁹ K.M. Jeffreys (ed), *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Inkomende Secreete Brieven, Gecommitteerde Bewindhebberen Kamer Amsterdam – Governor and Council, 23/10/1779 and 16/12/1779, pp.180-3.

¹⁰ C156, Resolutiën, 24/1/1778, pp.105-13, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

not show respect to the Castle. On 11 March they saluted the Castle with 11 guns, was answered, and the provisioning commenced.¹¹

Though only two French warships visited the Cape during 1779, both were ships of the line and both escorted convoys. It was clear that Britain was reinforcing her position in the East as Admiral Hughes' strengthened squadron (seven British warships of which six were ships of the line) visited the Cape on their return voyage to India in July and August. Three Spanish frigates visited the Cape in the same year. By 1780, with the war between Britain and France reaching global proportions, warship visits dramatically increased and the animosity between the belligerents was at times managed with difficulty. Warships visits for the year included 10 French warships (five ships of the line), seven British warships (three ships of the line) one Danish warship and one Spanish frigate.¹² Two of the British naval vessels, however, belonged to Captain Cook's expedition and they were not part of the war effort.¹³

The British Navy and Army commanders in the East were regular visitors to the Cape. Besides Hughes' two visits, Lieutenant General Eyre Coote, the C-in-C of the British forces in India, arrived at the Cape onboard the EEIC ship *Stafford* in September 1779. Coote was received with much formality: Van Prehn met him at the jetty, while the Imhoff Battery fired a seventeen gun salute. He then went to the Castle (in a coach harnessed with six horses) where he was received with full military honours by all the officers while a guard of honour presented arms. After spending a month at the Cape, the *Stafford* eventually departed with two other EEIC ships and the *HMS Asia* (64) to Bombay on 10 October.¹⁴

The Cape effectively acted as a British base. British ships did not only replenish here, but they were repaired here, while their crewmembers recuperated at the Cape. In addition, the Cape also became a convoy assembly point and it was very important for the provisioning St Helena Island. The Cape was also valuable to the so-called voyages of discovery. Following Captain Cook's death (at Hawaii) his ships, *HMS Resolution* (16) and *Discovery* (10) arrived at the Cape on 12 April 1780. Since they left Britain in 1776, the ships were understandably in a bad shape and required considerable repairs. The VOC shipwright even went to False Bay to assist with repairing the *Resolution's* rudder.¹⁵ At the same time there were two fully laden British

¹¹ The figures and information relating to warship visits were mainly compiled from the Dagregisters for 1778, 1779 and 1780 and the above statistics does not include other ships. See K.M. Jeffreys (ed), *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1778, 1779, and 1780*.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Compiled mainly from the Dagregister in *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1780*, pp.113-83.

¹⁴ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1778*, Dagregister, 8/9/1799, 1/10/1799, 8/10/1799 and 10/10/1799, pp.202-3, 207, 209-10.

¹⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1780*, Dagregister, 12/4/1780 and 9/5/1780, pp.135 and 140.

East Indiamen at anchor in the bay, awaiting an escort vessel. Van Plettenberg informed Cook's ships that the belligerents issued orders to let them "pass unmolested" and when *HMS Sybil* arrived to convoy the two East Indiamen to Britain, the *Resolution* and *Discovery* did not join the convoy to maintain the neutral status afforded to them.¹⁶

Cruising around the South African coast was not easy, especially in winter, but as the Dutch had no naval presence it provided other fleets with the opportunity to roam. When M. De Tronjoly, the French Naval Commander at Mauritius ordered two frigates, *Le Pourvoyeuse* and *L'Elisabeth*, to cruise off Agulhas they only captured one prize on 21 February 1779. Yet, it was the *Osterley*, a richly laden EEIC East Indiamen worth the immense sum of £300 000 at the time. The "rijk geladene" *Osterley* was immediately taken to Mauritius, while her passengers were transferred to the French ship *Le Vaillant* and taken to the Cape.¹⁷ The British passengers were allowed to depart with the EEIC ship *Ceres*, while the *Osterley* went into French service.

Commenting on the *Osterley* affair, Turner, like other historians is of the opinion that though a French squadron at the Cape would have caused the British "serious inconvenience, British shipping could stretch far to the southward".¹⁸ This is not so. Due to the wind and weather conditions around the Cape ships on a passage to the Indies went south to pick up strong winds (the roaring forties). But due to the winds and currents around southern Africa, the best passage for the valuable and heavy laden East Indiamen was to keep close to the coast on their return voyage. Also if they wished to catch good weather in the Atlantic, they had to round the Cape before March or April. So, the "cruising season" around the Cape was in actual fact limited, which would facilitate maritime interdiction.

Similarly to the British, French naval squadrons and merchantmen also made much use of the Cape. In April 1779 the French ship of the line *L'Orient* (74) and a small convoy replenished at the Cape.¹⁹ Another French ship of the line, *Le Sévère* (64), arrived with a convoy in False Bay on 4 July and wished to stay until their sick crewmembers had sufficiently recuperated. However, when they heard that a British squadron might be in the vicinity on 8 July, they immediately prepared their ships for sea and departed to Mauritius on 13 July.²⁰ On Wednesday 12 January 1780 a French naval squadron with three ships of the line, one fourth rate ship and

¹⁶ King, J., *A voyage to the Pacific Ocean undertaken by the Command of his Majesty for making discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere. Performed under the Direction of Captains Cook, Clerke and Gore ...*, Volume III, pp.480-2.

¹⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Particuliere Brieven, Parry and Barwell – Van Plettenberg, undated, p.238; and *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1779*, Dagregister, 2/3/1779, p.152.

¹⁸ L.C.F. Turner, *The Cape of Good Hope and the Trafalgar Campaign*, p.109.

¹⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1779*, Dagregister, 12/4/1779 and 27/4/1779, pp.163 and 167.

²⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1779*, Dagregister, 8/7/1779 and 13/7/1779, p.184.

two frigates under the command of De Tronjoly arrived from Mauritius to replenish at the Cape. They utilised the Cape like a naval base and De Tronjoly despatched *Le Sévère* (64), *Le Consolante* (38) and *Le Subtile* (20) on a two week patrol of the surrounding seas on 21 January (they returned on 3 February), while his fleet replenished. Governor Van Plettenberg dined with De Tronjoly onboard his flagship *Le Brillant* (64) on 29 February and the squadron only returned to Mauritius on 3 March.²¹ At the end of May 1780 four more French warships (two of them ships of the line) arrived with a convoy and departed again on 12 July.²²

While De Tronjoly's squadron was in Table Bay, two richly laden EEIC East Indiamen, the *Southampton* and *Nassau*, put into False Bay on 3 February 1780. They probably put into False Bay and not Table Bay to get Dutch protection as soon as possible as they might have seen the French ships that patrolled the coast and knew they might be captured if they ventured around Cape Point and sailed into Table Bay. Their Captains immediately requested Dutch protection against French warships and cruisers from Van Plettenberg. De Tronjoly assured Van Plettenberg that his ships would not attack them while they were at the Cape. Van Plettenberg notified the British that they were under Dutch protection as the two countries were at peace.²³ On 25 April the British frigate *HMS Sybil* (32) arrived "on a secret mission" from Plymouth and departed with the two EEIC ships on 5 May.²⁴ A few months later (in October 1780) when Captain Fraser of the EEIC ship *Earl of Mansfield* was ill and could not sail, he asked Van Plettenberg for the protection a neutral port provided in the case of an enemy fleet arriving. He was assured that he could rely on Dutch protection.²⁵ A neutral Cape was indeed important to the valuable British ships, as it provided them with the security of a friendly port. Britain had all the privileges of having a base at the Cape, without actually having to maintain it themselves.

Besides the replenishment of French ships, regular traffic existed between the French Indian Ocean islands and the Cape. French transport vessels like *L'Hercule*, *La Mouche* and other ships constantly did the supply-run between Reunion, Mauritius and the Cape.²⁶ Intelligence about ship movements were always important, specifically as ships could be intercepted at sea once they left port. Consequently the commander of the French ships in False Bay, De Bouvet, asked Van Plettenberg late in May not to allow the British packet ship, the *Betsy*,

²¹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1780*, Dagregister, 12/1/1780, 21/1/1780, 3/2/1780, 29/2/1780 and 3/3/1780, pp.114, 117, 120 and 127.

²² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1780*, Dagregister, 29/5/1780, 3/6/1780 and 12/7/1780, pp.147 and 154-5.

²³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1780*, Dagregister, 8/2/1780, p.121.

²⁴ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1780*, Dagregister, 25/4/1780 and 5/5/1780, pp.137 and 139.

²⁵ C158, Resolutiën, 7/10/1780, pp.314-23, <http://databases/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁶ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1780*, Dagregister, 3/2/1780, 16/5/1780, 28/11/1780 and 12/12/1780, pp.120, 143, 176 and 178.

to leave False Bay before his whole convoy had arrived. The Council of Policy did not grant the request, stating that since the Dutch Republic was at peace with Britain, they could not prevent the *Betsy* from sailing. De Bouvet was asked to do nothing to damage the neutrality of the Dutch flag.²⁷

During the war a number of problems were experienced with foreign warships at the Cape. Much of it was due to a lack of VOC authority and the fact that the Dutch had no naval presence. Between 19 July 1779 and middle August a British convoy of seven warships (six ships of the line) and fourteen EEIC ships under the command of Admiral Hughes were in Simon's Bay.²⁸ The squadron moved from False Bay to Table Bay in September to continue with replenishment and wait for crewmembers in hospital to recuperate. On 29 September the French ship *Le Solomon* approached Table Bay under a Danish flag, but when she saw the British warships at anchor, she turned around and went to Simon's Bay instead.²⁹

When the French brigantine *La Mouche* proceeded towards Table Bay on 1 November, she was chased by the British sloop *HMS Nymph* (18), under the command of Captain Blankett, who fired at her and damaged her sails and rigging. After the Dutch flag broke at the Castle, Hughes signalled the *Nymph* to cease fire, which she immediately did. But when *La Mouche* passed between the *Chavonnes Battery* and the British ships at anchor, the British East Indiaman *Ceres* fired a shot at her. That same afternoon the *Nymph* and another British ship, the *Hind Cutter*, again gave chase to a French ship approaching Table Bay, but the ship escaped and the British ships returned to the anchorage. Two days later (3 November) the French vessel they chased (*Le Grand Bourbon* from Mauritius) arrived at Simon's Bay. No doubt, to the relief of the French, the 21 ship British fleet departed on 4 November.³⁰ Captain Bourbon of *La Mouche* officially protested to the Governor and claimed compensation. The Council of Policy informed the *Heeren XVII* about the incident and despatched a formal protest to Hughes about the disdain the British showed for the neutral flag of the United Provinces, asking him to explain the matter.³¹

When the *Ceres* anchored in Simon's Town on 15 July 1780 Van Plettenberg requested a formal explanation from its Captain, Raymond Snow. Snow explained that they were exercising

²⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1780*, Resolutiën, 31/5/1780, p.53.

²⁸ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1779*, Dagregister, 29/7/1779 to 11/8/1779, pp.186-91.

²⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1779*, Dagregister, 8/7/1779, 13/7/1779, 29/09/1779 and 7/10/1779, pp.184 and 198-9.

³⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1779*, Dagregister, 1/11/1779, 3/11/1779 and 4/11/1779, pp.205-7.

³¹ NAN VOC4292, Proces verbaal door de officieren van het fransch scheepje *La Mouche* nopens vijandelijkheeden bij de Caab gepleegt, pp.204-5; VOC4292, Missive diesweegens door den gouverneur en raad aan Edward Hughes, 16/1/1780; pp.206-7; and VOC4292, Declaratoir van den constapel des casteels dat de vlag ..., p.208. See also *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1779*, Resolutiën, 16/11/1779, pp.116-20.

their guns and were just securing them when a ship “alongside of us, run up French Colours, and a Gun to my great Surprise was fired but absolutely without my Ordres or Consent”.³² The Council accepted the explanation. In December 1780 a letter of explanation from Hughes arrived at the Cape with the *Nymph*.³³ Hughes explained that the *Nymph* chased *La Mouche* in international waters “when she was in the offing” which is not unusual in war, yet, she was ordered to end the chase when the French ship entered neutral waters. He expressed his “contempt” for the “mean and unjustifiabel an Act” by Captain Snow, but added that merchantmen were “not bound or amenable to the Naval Articles of War”. Hughes reiterated that he “had no intention to shew any disrespect to the Flag of their High Mightinesses Your Souveraigns, for during my stay at the Cape of Good Hope, I have ever pay’d the highest attention of the Rights of Their High Mightinessess”.³⁴ Early in 1781 his answer was in hands of the *Heeren XVII*, but as war broke out, it would be years for an answer to reach the Cape.

Saluting the Castle was the accepted pattern for British warships as the detailed record on the arrival of British (and other) warships in the *Dagregisters* clearly indicate. On every visit to the Cape, Cook diligently reported that he saluted the Castle with between eleven and fifteen guns (his ships were always commissioned warships) and immediately received the same number of guns in return.³⁵ This was the accepted protocol. However, on 25 August 1780 a homeward bound British convoy with nine East Indiamen and three warships (*HMS Belle Isle* (64), *HMS Asia* (64) and *HMS Rippon* (60)), with Captain Robert Barbor as Commodore entered Table Bay and did not salute the Dutch Flag.³⁶

The next day Captain De Lille went to the flagship to enquire about the British intention to salute. Barbor was not onboard, but went ashore without notifying the authorities to organise accommodation.³⁷ When De Lille got hold of Barbor and asked him when they were going to salute so that preparations could be made, he indicated that he had no intention to salute the flag of a trading company which happened to have the colour scheme of a State Flag. Even if it was the flag of the Dutch State, they would have to salute the British Flag first and the ships would then answer. He had no orders to salute foreign forts, but warships were at liberty to salute out of

³² NAN VOC4295, Copie Engelsche missive van de capitain Snow aan als even over’t in Cabo gemelde geval, 18/7/1780, p.128.

³³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1780*, Dagregister, 16/12/1780, p.178.

³⁴ NAN VOC4295, Copie Engelsche missive van den schout bij nagt Hughes ..., 2/09/1780, pp.126-7. See also *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1780*, Resolutiën, 27/12/1780, Hughes – Van Plettenberg, 2/9/1780, 1780, pp.110-1; as well as *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 9/1/1781, pp.1-2.

³⁵ See for example J. Cook, *A voyage towards the South Pole and round the World*, I, pp.16 and 19; and *A voyage towards the South Pole*, II, pp.250 and 269.

³⁶ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1780*, Dagregister, 25/8/1780, p.161.

³⁷ CA C158, Resolutiën, 27/8/1780, pp.249-68.

courtesy and they would then have to be answered with an equal number of shots. On the issue of going ashore without notifying the authorities and without proper ceremony (as a foreign naval commander he had to be received by the Governor), Barbor stated that he will treat the Governor as the person Baron Van Plettenberg, with honour and salute him if they met by chance, but he will not salute the Castle or the flag. De Lille warned Barbor that his vessels might not be refreshed.³⁸

The Council of Policy was perplexed, “als nu nopens het voorsz. gedoente ... gehandeld”,³⁹ specifically as all previous British squadrons and warships had saluted, including Hughes in 1779, under whose command Barbor then was. It was an insult to the Dutch Republic and in accordance with the orders off the High Council of the Indies (dated 6 October 1750), Barbor's squadron should receive no refreshments except water and firewood. Yet, in the end the Council decided to refresh the ships for the following reasons: the two countries were at peace; Barbor's attitude was not representative of British attitude (sic); all the other Captains (of both the warships and Indiamen) apparently indicated that they did not agree with Barbor's action and were prepared to salute; and it would be a disservice to the British crown, the EEIC and all the locals at the Cape that can profit from the occasion if they did not provision the British ships. Doing business was more important to the VOC than enforcing Dutch authority.⁴⁰

A few days later a written protest was taken to the British flagship and the Council of Policy protested to States-General about Barbor's behaviour.⁴¹ Barbor on the other hand, seemed to have enjoyed the hospitality of the Cape as it was nearly two months later, on 12 October, his convoy and an additional EEIC ship that arrived in the meantime, departed. Again, none of the warships saluted, but one of the EEIC ships, the *Ganges*, saluted the flag with fifteen guns and was answered by thirteen from the *Couvre face Imhoff*.⁴² The protest of the Council of Policy and De Lille's report on the Barbor incident only reached the *Heeren XVII* in 1781, after the outbreak of the war with Britain.⁴³

An answer from the *Heeren XVII* on both the *La Mouche* and the Barbor incidents only arrived at the Cape in 1783. The incident involving *La Mouche*, *HMS Nymph* and *Ceres* was not

³⁸ NAN VOC4295, Rapport van den capitain militair C.M.W. de Lille wegens zijne commissie betreffende den engelsche commandant en capitain R. Barbor over zijne komst en dies gevolgen aan de Caab, 26/08/1780, pp.129-31.

³⁹ CA C158, Resolutiën, 27/8/1780, pp.249-68.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ CA C158, Resolutiën, 31/8/1780, pp.269-79.

⁴² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1780*, Dagregister, 12/10/1780, p.168.

⁴³ NAN VOC4295, Rapport van den capitain militair C.M.W. de Lille ..., 26/08/1780, pp.129-31; and VOC4295, Protest van de Caabsche ministers tegens de gehoudene handelingen van gemelde engelsche commandant, 28/8/1780, pp.132-37.

an error of Hughes or the Captain of the *Ceres*, and Van Plettenberg had acted correctly. However, concerning the Barbor incident the *Heeren XVII* made it clear to Van Plettenberg that they should not have provisioned the British, as Barbor refused to salute “op soo onbeschaafde wijze”. Furthermore, such incidents and the submissive attitude shown was very damaging to the declining authority of the VOC: “dergelijke behandelinen en te verregaande toegeevendheeden doen bij de vreemde natien veel al een verkeerde uytwerking en strecken zeecker tot declin van ‘s Compagnies aanzien en gezag”.⁴⁴ These incidents confirmed that the Cape authorities had very little ability to enforce its authority within its own waters; in fact with no naval ability, they were essentially powerless outside the range of the guns on their fortifications.

Even before the Netherlands became involved in the war, Dutch ships were targets of British privateers. Some VOC ships were taken, but others like the *Vrijheid*, *T Loo* and *Vrouwe Anthonetta Coenrardina*, reached the Cape with the tales of their lucky escape.⁴⁵ The rising tension between Britain and the Dutch Republic and the British disregard for Dutch authority was now also very evident at the Cape. The two states were indeed on the road to war.

3. THE OUTBREAK OF THE FOURTH ANGLO-DUTCH WAR

During the War of American Independence a serious confrontation between Britain and the Dutch Republic became unavoidable. Dutch business was eager to profit from neutrality, especially when France allied herself with the Americans. Initially it seemed that Anglo-Dutch relations would be the same as in the Seven Years War, but high-handed British actions exasperated Dutch merchants and ship-owners and influenced a decision to provide more convoys for the protection of merchantmen in 1779. In April 1780 the States-General approved unlimited convoys, which implies “through a British blockade if necessary”.⁴⁶

In the British view, the “irritation with Holland became intense”, specifically after the draft of a proposed secret commercial treaty between the Netherlands and the new United States became known in September 1780.⁴⁷ Relations deteriorated and in the British view, the war gave the Dutch an apparent opportunity to extend their seaborne trade at their expense.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Inkomende Brieven, *Heeren XVII* – Van Plettenberg, 7/12/1782, pp.390-2.

⁴⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1779*, Resolutiën, 27/12/1779 and Dagregister, 7/5/1779, pp.139 and 169-72.

⁴⁶ N.A.M. Rodger, ‘The British View of the Functioning of the Anglo-Dutch Alliance, 1688-1795’ in G.J.A. Raven and N.A.M. Rodger (eds), *Navies and Armies*, p.25.

⁴⁷ H.W. Richmond, *The Navy in India 1763-1783*, p.119.

⁴⁸ W.E.H. Lecky, *A History of England*, V, pp.71-2.

Furthermore, the British considered Dutch shipping and colonies as easy prey and thought it would offset the setbacks they suffered at American and French hands. The worsening British position in America therefore made war with the Dutch more possible.⁴⁹

In 1780 Denmark, Prussia, Sweden and Russia formed the League of Armed Neutrality with the aim to force Britain to respect the rights of neutrals at sea during her war with France. Neutral ships had the right to carry free goods and only obvious military items were considered contraband. The Netherlands decided to join the League of Armed Neutrality in October 1780, as they thought Britain would not risk a war with another European state (in addition to France and Spain) and had confidence in support from other neutral powers. But the breach with Britain was already too big and the British wanted to stop the disadvantages of the Dutch commercial practices. They were prepared to rather fight, than relinquish their contested right to search Dutch ships for contraband and military stores.⁵⁰ War became inevitable. The British Ambassador in The Hague was withdrawn and on 20 December 1780 war was declared against the United Provinces.⁵¹

A few years later George Washington would remark that the “most sincere neutrality is not a sufficient guard against the depredations of nations at war. To secure respect to a neutral flag requires a naval force, organized and ready to vindicate it, from insult or aggression. This may even prevent the necessity of going to war, by discouraging the belligerent powers from committing such violation of the rights of the neutral party”.⁵² He could have just as well referred to the Dutch Republic. It is in this that they failed.

The Netherlands was not what it used to be. It emerged from a long period of peace, had a weak Stadtholder, a form of government not suited for decisive and concentrated action, experienced grave internal dissension and was much feebler than during her wars with England a century earlier. The Dutch Navy was inadequate for the protection of Dutch dominions and trade. Yet, proportionally to her size, she was still the richest state in Europe, with a proud maritime and naval tradition, which potentially made her a formidable adversary. This was something British statesmen were worried about, specifically since they had to face France, Spain, the Netherlands and the new United States.⁵³

⁴⁹ J.I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, p.1097.

⁵⁰ C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch seaborne empire, 1600-1800*, p.111.

⁵¹ H.W. Richmond, *The Navy in India*, p.119; and W.E.H. Lecky, *A History of England*, V, pp.71-2.

⁵² George Washington, 1796, quoted in J. Baylis et al, *Strategy in the Contemporary World. An Introduction to Strategic Studies*, p.117.

⁵³ W.E.H. Lecky, *History of England*, V, pp.72-3.

As a strong naval power Britain was a very dangerous enemy to the Netherlands. This, the Dutch knew and understood. The Dutch Navy was so weakened that it was unable to provide proper escorts for its merchant ships and did not have the naval capacity to properly defend its colonies against a seaward threat, which left them at risk from an attack by the British. When war broke out, the Dutch did not have more than twenty ships of the line and forty frigates available for active service, while the average age of their warships were seventeen years. In terms of personnel, the Dutch Navy had manpower shortages and struggled to recruit sailors. Its officers had seen very little active service and its senior command lacked initiative. As the Stadtholder failed to unite the country in the war effort, he became the scapegoat for the failure of the war.⁵⁴

The various Dutch Admiralties were candid about the many problems they had when war broke out. It was difficult to get ships armed and ready, to train crews and find enough experienced manpower to be able with to fight at sea against a state so well prepared for war at sea. Dutch ships were often old. For example, the Admiralty of the Maaze informed the Stadtholder that their two largest warships, the *Maaze* (70), was build in 1728, while the *Prins Willem* (70) was build in 1748. Their other ships with exception of one (built in the 1760's) were constructed in the 1730's and 1740's. They were in the process of constructing some new ships of which one was a ship of the line.⁵⁵ The Admiralties of Friesland and the North had only two frigates, which were used as escort vessels to meet the return fleet of the VOC in 1779.⁵⁶ The Admiralty of Zeeland complained that their ships were old, many were constructed in the 1730's and many were scrapped. They were repairing and refitting old ships, and also provided ships to escort the return fleet.⁵⁷ Amsterdam, the richest and biggest of the Admiralties, reported that they had 15 ships of the line and 25 frigates, but many of the vessels were not seaworthy or operational. They supplied frigates as escorts for the return fleets and though they were coppering and refitting their ships, they experienced a shortage of crews. They were, however, addressing the shortcomings and were constructing eleven ships of the line and one large frigate (with the assistance of the yards and carpenters of the VOC).⁵⁸

⁵⁴ J. R. Bruijn, *The Dutch Navy of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, pp.156-7.

⁵⁵ *IMH Rapporten van de respectie Collegien ter Admiraliteiten deezer landen, over hunne verrichtingen, geduurende den oorlog met Engeland en deszelfs colonien, tot het jaar 1781*, Collegie ter Admiraliteit op de Maaze – Stadtholder, 23/8/1781, pp.5-8.

⁵⁶ *IMH Rapporten van de respectie Collegien ter Admiraliteiten, 1781*, Admiraliteit te Amsterdam – Stadtholder, 8/8/1781, pp.56-66 and 82.

⁵⁷ *IMH Rapporten van de respectie Collegien ter Admiraliteiten, 1781*, Admiraliteit in Zeeland – Stadtholder, 13/8/1781, pp.107-11.

⁵⁸ *IMH Rapporten van de respectie Collegien ter Admiraliteiten, 1781*, Colegie ter Admiraliteit in Westfriesland en den Noorder Quartiere – Stadtholder, 2/10/1781, pp.56-66 and 82.

The Fourth Anglo-Dutch War was a trade war. As a result of their inadequate naval capacity, Dutch trade was very vulnerable to British attacks. By 6 January 1781, 60 Dutch ships were already captured, while a month later the figure rose to 200 captured ships. Every day after that brought more losses, while the Dutch were urgently recruiting crews and equipping warships.⁵⁹ Israel stated that the war quickly became “an unmitigated disaster for the Dutch ... completely paralysing what remained of Dutch shipping”.⁶⁰ Some Dutch historians, however, are quick to point out that although Dutch merchant shipping did come to a standstill for a while, ship-owners soon realised the opportunities the flags of neutral states like Denmark, the Habsburg Empire and various German cities provided and they used these flags.⁶¹ Notwithstanding the fact that many Dutch ships did sail under such flags, the effect of the war on the Dutch seaborne trade was still fundamental and Gaastra truthfully pointed out that “pogingen om de vaart onder neutrale vlag voort de zetten lukten maar zeer ten dele”.⁶²

Though the Dutch Republic knew that naval vessels were crucial to the defence of their overseas possessions against Britain, their naval power was just too depleted to provide the required assistance to the VOC. Much apprehension existed in the Netherlands about the safety of the Cape of Good Hope, specifically as its defences were completely inadequate, as De Jonge mentioned: “De verdedigingswerken waren zoo lang en zoo schandelijk verwaarloosd en die nu voorhanden middelen zoo gering...”.⁶³ The Dutch were convinced that the British would attack the Cape, and that it would be very difficult to repulse them.

When the maritime powers fought across the Atlantic they did not need an intermediate port of supply due to the proximity of America. It was different with the East. Despatching forces to the East took a long time. Large naval forces with troopships took seven to eight months from Europe to the East where they had to fight. Obviously such long voyages involving warships and troopships with a large number of personnel onboard required well-located bases on the route, equally spaced, that were well-defended, with adequate supplies and with an ideal anchorage for replenishment, refitting and repairs. None of the belligerents had such a base on this route, until the Dutch became French allies.⁶⁴ Though the British had St Helena (for homebound ships), their ships sailing to India depended on the support of neutral Portugal who had the Cape Verde Island

⁵⁹ A.R. Kravenhoff van de Leur, *Militair-historische schetsen: over de noodzakelijkheid van de kennis der krijgsgeschiedenis*, pp.104-5.

⁶⁰ J.I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, p.1097.

⁶¹ J. R. Bruijn, *The Dutch Navy of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, p.157.

⁶² F.S. Gaastra, *De Geschiedenis van de VOC*, p.166.

⁶³ J.C. de Jonge, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche zeewezen*, Volume IV, pp.469-70.

⁶⁴ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of sea power upon history*, pp.520-1.

and the Brazilian ports. Strategically the Cape became very significant to the British and even the EEIC directors referred to the value of this “key” as “self-evident and unquestioned”.⁶⁵

The first concern of the *Heeren XVII* was naturally with ships, trade and possessions. On Christmas Day 1780 they notified the various *Kamers* about the news they had received from London. As a result the utmost care had to be taken with all the affairs of the VOC with as much confidentiality and secrecy as possible.⁶⁶ Letters were written to the various Governors in which they were reminded that they had to do everything in their power to bolster the defence of their possessions.⁶⁷ Captains were ordered to be vigilant, to keep their ships prepared for action and maintain proper discipline, not to sail alone and not to sail close to the coast of Britain.⁶⁸ The isolated positions of the VOC were generally open to amphibious attack as they did not have the support of large hinterlands and had no large garrisons or impregnable fortifications (which were too expensive for a commercial trading company bent on profits). It was clear that a committed European attacker would easily achieve success. As a result of the weakness of the Dutch Republic they would have to depend on French assistance.⁶⁹

Defence of their trading empire in the East and the Cape was imperative to the VOC, but they had a shortage of troops and these establishments were close to defenceless. Already in 1778 the Governor-General and High Council of the Indies asked the Stadtholder to assist the VOC with 2000 soldiers, 200 artillerymen and 2000 seamen as they had only 1150 soldiers at Batavia of which 187 were European. The Governor-General made it clear to the *Heeren XVII* in 1779 that the VOC was militarily in a desperate (“bijna weerloozen”) situation.⁷⁰ After war broke out the *Heeren XVII* immediately requested assistance from the State and the fact that the VOC had insufficient military power to properly protect her possessions, was of much worry to the state.

The *Heeren XVII* was conscious of the fact that British operations would focus around the Indian Peninsula and they ordered the concentration of their military forces at the most important locations.⁷¹ The VOC had 95 ships (essentially merchant vessels of various types) and 8500

⁶⁵ A.J. Guy, ‘British Strategy and the Cape’ in P.B. Boyden, et al (eds), *“Ashes and Blood” The British Army*, I, p.33.

⁶⁶ NAN VOC4541, *Heeren XVII* – Respectie Kamenen, 25/12/1780.

⁶⁷ NAN VOC4541, *Heeren XVII* – Raad Extraordinair van Nederlands Indiën, Gouverneur, Joachim van Plettenberg benewens den Raad aan Cabo de Goede Hoop, 25/12/1780.

⁶⁸ NAN VOC4541, *Heeren XVII* – Schippers en verdere overheden, 25/12/1780.

⁶⁹ J. Black, *Warfare in the Eighteenth Century*, p.96.

⁷⁰ F. Gastra, “Sware continuerende Lasten ...” in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (ed), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.97.

⁷¹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, *Inkomende Secreete Brieven, Heeren XVII* – Gouverneur Generaal en Raaden Nederlands Indiën, 19/2/1781, pp.189-191.

troops – not nearly enough for the protection of its vast empire. In the British estimation the condition of the VOC defences at the Cape and in the Indies were so poor that they “...de Hollanders aldaar zo goed als overwonnen rekenden”.⁷² They therefore grabbed the opportunity and soon captured the very important VOC possessions of Trincomalee on Ceylon as well as Tutacorin, Negapatnam, Bengal, Padang and a number of forts on the west coast of Sumatra.⁷³ Many ships were also captured⁷⁴ as well as Dutch islands in the Caribbean and forts in West Africa.

The Dutch State was in a predicament. As it had neglected its own defences, the war with Britain posed massive challenges. The VOC Committee for Secret Affairs asked Lieutenant-Colonel Van Prehn (then living in the Netherlands) about the defence capability of the Cape, but Van Prehn only replied that it was in urgent need of improvement.⁷⁵ In this dangerous situation urgent military assistance for the defence of the Cape of Good Hope and VOC Empire in the East was required. As the Dutch Republic was in no position to provide it, France, an archenemy of Britain and now the Dutch ally, was the obvious place to seek such help. Dutch appeals were successful and French assistance in the war became substantial.⁷⁶ Detail concerning French-Dutch diplomacy and military assistance would be discussed in the next two chapters.

Shortly after the war broke out the French Minister of Marine, De Castries, ordered the Commanding Officer in Brest, D'Hector, on 30 December 1780 to despatch a corvette to warn the Cape of the British declaration of war.⁷⁷ Days later, on 9 January 1781, *Le Sylphide*, departed from Brest destined for the Cape and Mauritius. *Le Sylphide* arrived at the Cape on Saturday 31 March 1781⁷⁸ and the Council of Policy immediately met to discuss the defence of the Cape, while *Le Sylphide* prepared to continue her voyage to Mauritius. In a letter (dated 29 December 1780) that arrived with *Le Sylphide*, the Dutch Ambassador at the French Court, Lestevenon van Berkenrode warned that an attack on the Cape was very possible (“zeer mogelijk”) and they had

⁷² J. Wagenaar, *Vaderlandsche Historie, Vervattende de Geschiedenissen der Vereenigde Nederlanden* Derde Deel, Boek VI, Volume 27, pp.271-2.

⁷³ G. Teitler, ‘De Marine en de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie’ in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.60; and W.E.H. Lecky, *History of England*, V, p.80.

⁷⁴ IMH Milo 163, *Geschiedenis van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, betreffende een opgave en beschrijving van 13 belangrijke zeeslagen, 1595-1799*, p.56.

⁷⁵ NAN VOC4536, Rapport van de bewindhebber J. Graafland aan de *Heeren XVII* betreffende de verrichtingen van de secrete committee, 9/7/1781.

⁷⁶ NAN VOC4536, Rapport van de bewindhebber J. Graafland aan de *Heeren XVII* betreffende de verrichtingen van de secrete committee, 9/7/1781.

⁷⁷ L.C.F. Turner, *The Cape of Good Hope and the Trafalgar Campaign*, p.95.

⁷⁸ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister, 31/3/1781, p.230.

to prepare the defences without delay.⁷⁹ As Staring stated, with the defence of the Cape in a poor condition and the prospect of a British expedition arriving any day, “Men schrok hevig”.⁸⁰

4. THE CAPE AT THE ONSET OF WAR AND LOCAL DEFENSIVE MEASURES

4.1. Local Conditions and Preparations for War

The authorities at the Cape received news of the war with alarm since they realised that the Cape was a sought after possession for the British, while their own defences were weak. Governor Van Plettenberg was in a difficult position as he would have to make decisions without consultation with the VOC, as the normal slow correspondence would even be more irregular in wartime. Though he had more than a decade of experience as Governor, in other terms he was relative inexperienced and had a poor appreciation of military matters. Van Plettenberg was not at all keen about the prospects of being the wartime Governor of the Cape and asked the Stadtholder to be relieved from his post, soon after news of the war arrived.⁸¹ This, however, only took place a number of years later. So, what was the situation at the Cape at the outbreak of war, and which actions were taken in order to place the Cape on a more secure footing?

European wars usually had a positive influence on the Cape economy. Due to the large fleets visiting the Cape during the American War of Independence the demand for agricultural products rose, and with it produce became dearer. Besides provisioning ships for long voyages, while at the anchorage in Table Bay and Simon's Bay, ships also received fresh produce, meat and bread on a daily basis. Between 1 May 1779 and 1 May 1781 alone, about 126 foreign ships with a combined crew of 22 826 visited the Cape and each ship stayed for about 40 days, which made the supply requirements large. By the middle of 1781 the demand for meat was larger than the immediate supply.⁸² Soon other produce, like brandy and wine, were also in short supply.

After the outbreak of war, French ships were the most common visitors to the Cape, even eclipsing visits by Dutch ships. But it is noteworthy that during the two years before news of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War arrived at the Cape, most of the foreign ships that visited were British, most of the foreign sailors and soldiers replenishing at the Cape were British and the British ships

⁷⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 31/3/1781, Lestevenon Van Berkenroode – Van Plettenberg, 19/12/1780, p.41.

⁸⁰ A. Staring, *Damiaan Hugo Staring. Een Zeeman uit de Achttiende Eeuw*, p.90.

⁸¹ NAN 1.01.50 – 1192, Van Plettenberg – Stadhouder, 20/4/1781.

⁸² G. Wagenaar, Johannes Gysbertus van Reenen – Sy aandeel in die Kaapse Geskiedenis tot 1806, pp.42-58.

stayed the longest. As Wagenaar illustrated, much detail concerning the arrival and departure of foreign ships, the personnel onboard, as well as the duration of their stay during this period, was recorded in the Dagregisters.⁸³

Table 3: Foreign ships visiting the Cape between 1 May 1779 and 30 April 1781			
Country of Origin	Number of ships	Persons onboard	Average stay at Cape
Britain	48	10 076	50
Other states	34	4 199	21
France	44	8 551	43

In a letter Van Plettenberg wrote to Hendrik Swellengrebel Jnr⁸⁴ in 1780, he mentioned the various visits by French and British warships to the Cape and that diplomatically he had to be careful to always maintain his impartiality. Van Plettenberg also explained that the war had positive spin-offs, as the passing British and French squadrons stimulated the local economy and raised prices. Supplying the French islands in the Indian Ocean was very advantageous to the Cape, since they bought provisions and ship it out themselves, without cost or risk to the Dutch.⁸⁵

Two major problems Van Plettenberg faced at the time was the opposition by the *Kaapse Patriotte* as well as the situation on the Eastern Frontier of the Cape. The agitation of the *Kaapse Patriotte* for political rights and more economic freedom resulted in a burgher deputation going to the Netherlands in October 1779. The *Heeren XVII* used the war as an excuse not to give in to the full demands of the *Kaapse Patriotte* and offered only insignificant concessions such as the reconstitution of the High Court of Justice and the placing of more restrictions on the economic activities of Company officials.⁸⁶ Further protests would follow, but for now the war had priority.

Matters on the Eastern Frontier were disturbing. Though Van Plettenberg and some Xhosa Chiefs agreed in 1778 that the Fish River would be maintained as a frontier, it did not happen. After much stock theft, border disputes and constant reprisals, a number of punitive commandos were organised in 1779 and 1780. The Company wished to maintain its authority in the Frontier region, and appointed Adriaan van Jaarsveld as Commandant with the responsibility

⁸³ See the statistics in G. Wagenaar, Johannes Gysbertus van Reenen, p.58 as well as in C. Beyers, *Die Kaapse Patriotte*, pp.334-5.

⁸⁴ H. Swellengrebel, the son of a former Governor of the Cape, who lived on the family estate in the Netherlands, visited the Cape and travelled into the interior. See M.L. Barend-van Haften and B. Paasman, *De Kaap: Goede Hoop halverwege Indië. Bloemlezing van Kaapteksen uit de Compagniestijd*, p.161.

⁸⁵ G.J. Schutte (ed), *Briefwisseling van Hendrik Swellengrebel Jr oor Kaapse Sake, 1778-1792*, Van Plettenberg – Swellengrebel, 7/3/1780, p.108.

⁸⁶ C. Beyers, *Die Kaapse Patriotte*, pp.25-31 and 102-8.

to drive the Xhosa from the Suurveld. Between May and July 1781, the so-called First Frontier War took place when Van Jaarsveld and a commando consisting of burghers and Khoi routed the Xhosas and forced them back across the Fish River.

Van Plettenberg's most important responsibility and immediate attention, however, was the defence of the Cape against a British attack. During the long period of peace, the Cape defences were severely neglected. As the cost of running the Cape was substantially more than its revenue and the wealth and power of the VOC was declining, it could not afford to maintain a large garrison at the Cape or to build expensive fortifications. Visitors to the Cape were well aware of this. Captain Innes Munro, a British officer that visited the Cape in 1779, stated that the Dutch fortifications were "only formidable in name, for the Dutch have very few troops to defend the settlement, 500 regulars being the whole establishment; and as for the militia, they are not only contemptible soldiers, but so scattered over the country as to be incapable of ever rendering effectual services. There is not doubt that this place, in its present state of defence, might become an easy acquisition to a very inconsiderable force. Even the troops in our squadron could have put it, at the time we were there, into possession of Great Britain with little or no loss...".⁸⁷ The British had often mocked that it would be easy to capture the Cape before breakfast ("verovering der Kaap by een morgen ontbyt kon verrigt worden").⁸⁸ It was feared that this might now become reality.

On the positive side the command of the military establishment of the Cape underwent some change for the better before the outbreak of the War with the appointment of Gilquin and Gordon. It took the *Heeren XVII* about seven years and a war, to take heed of Tubagh's warning. They appointed Philippus Hermanus Gilquin as "Directeur Fortificatiën" and "Chef der Arthillerije" in 1778. Gilquin had a twelve year contract, was appointed as a Major and was in command of the artillery and engineering branches. In all military matters he stood directly under the command of the "Hoofd en Cheff der Militie". Gilquin's instructions from the *Heeren XVII* were clear. He had to investigate the state of the fortifications at the Cape, suggest improvements, make cost estimations and assist the Governor during the planning process. All VOC buildings and their maintenance were his responsibility and he had to appoint two assistants from the garrison as ensigns and train them to be employed as engineers.⁸⁹ Directly after arriving at the

⁸⁷ Captain Innes Munro quoted in C.V.E. Wahl, *Die Administrasie van die Kaap onder Goewerneur Van Plettenberg*, p.15.

⁸⁸ J. Wagenaar, *Vaderlandsche Historie*, III, VI, 27, p.278.

⁸⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1779*, Instructie van de verg. van 17^e voor Philippus Hermanus Gilquin Directeur van 's Comps Fortificatiën en Chef van d'Artillerie aan Cabo de Goede Hoop, undated, received on 12/04/1779, pp.476-8.

Cape, Gilquin indicated to the Council of Policy that he will commence as soon as possible with improving the existing defences and with creating new fortifications.⁹⁰ But at the same time he also made it clear that the buildings in the VOC yard and the fortifications were generally in a bad state and required much improvement.⁹¹

When Van Prehn retired from active duty on 22 February 1780 Gordon was appointed as “Hoofd der Militie” by the Council of Policy, something that was apparently promised to him before he came to the Cape.⁹² The VOC *wapenkamer* and military equipment was placed in his care and he also acted as President of the *Burgherkrijgsraad*. Gordon’s appointment was on the condition that it was approved by the VOC⁹³ and Gordon wrote to the *Heeren XVII*, requesting to be confirmed in the same rank and with the same title and status as Van Prehn.⁹⁴ The Council of Policy motivated the appointment by emphasising Gordon’s attributes as a competent soldier and his excellent local knowledge, stating that he had travelled deeper into the interior than anyone else.⁹⁵ Unfortunately these requests reached the Netherlands just before the outbreak of the war and the Cape did not receive a speedy answer. In the meantime it caused much frustration as Gordon was maintained on the rank of Captain, while Gilquin, who had to report to him, was a major.

After news of the war reached the Cape, it was only logical that a British attack would take place. As Van Plettenberg explained to the Stadtholder, VOC possessions were sought after and the British will not let the opportunity pass to bring the war to the Cape, specifically as the Cape also provided provisions to the French islands in the Indian Ocean. However, Van Plettenberg lamented, the Cape was not prepared for the unexpected declaration of war as they had too few regular soldiers and artillerists, and they lacked heavy artillery. With a standing force of close to 400 infantrymen and 50 men in the artillery and engineering formation, they could actually do very little in the face of a concerted attack and would not be able to repulse a skilled enemy conducting amphibious landings: “alhier onvoorsien is van de middelen ten minsten in eenen

⁹⁰ C157, Resolutiën, 13/4/1779, pp.174-97 and 4/5/1779, pp.225-50, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁹¹ C157, Resolutiën, 14/9/1779, pp.375-82, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁹² P. Cullinan, *Robert Jacob Gordon 1743-1795. The Man and his Travels at the Cape*, p.131.

⁹³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1780*, Resolutiën, 22/2/1780, p.16 and Resolutiën, 2/3/1780, Gordon – Van Plettenberg, pp.24-5.

⁹⁴ NAN VOC4292, Request van R.J. Gordon aan de vergadering van 17e om bevestigte te worden als hoofd van’s comps: militie aan de Caab, p.235.

⁹⁵ CA C1174 Requesten, Gordon – Council of Policy, 2/3/1780, pp.78-9; and C1769 Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – *Heeren XVII*, 9/3/1780, pp.37-9.

genoegsaamen voorraad als onontbeerlijk zijn om een onderneemend Vijand ... met kragt te repousseeren en van de Wal te houden".⁹⁶

The day after the Cape received news of the war, the British packet ship from St Helena Island, the snow *Betsy* (a two masted vessel very similar to a brig) unsuspectingly anchored in Table Bay. Sailors from French warships in the bay immediately boarded and captured her, but as it took place under the Dutch flag and the guns of the *Chavonnes Battery*, the French handed the vessel over to the Dutch. As the French frigate *Sylphide* first had to go to Mauritius and it was regarded as very urgent to warn Batavia and the Indies, the newly acquired *Betsy* (renamed *Postiljon* by Van Plettenberg) could be utilised.⁹⁷ Francois Renier Duminy (a retired French naval officer living at the Cape) was deemed capable to perform this important mission and was appointed as Captain (Skipper) of the *Postiljon*. He had to sail to the Malabar Coast of India first, to warn Cochin, and then to Ceylon. Duminy performed his mission successfully and arrived back at the Cape on 8 October.⁹⁸ At the same time (on 2 April) the Council of Policy also decided the VOC packet *Herstelder* (actually on her way to Europe with wheat), had to leave for Batavia with dispatches within twenty-four hours.

The fact that *Postiljon* was despatched so urgently to the Indian subcontinent and Ceylon, is an indication that the VOC understood the British strategy. These possessions were indeed under the greatest threat of a British attack, as the British focus was the Indian peninsula and its surrounds. The *Heeren XVII* were very impressed with Van Plettenberg's actions and congratulated him afterwards.⁹⁹

On 2 April the Council of Policy had a special meeting to put a number of emergency defence measures in place and to decide on how to ensure the safety of the very valuable VOC return ships at the Cape. The Council of Policy granted Van Plettenberg special powers to make decisions and issue orders in an emergency, without consulting with them first.¹⁰⁰ They then issued a number of instructions pertaining to the internal defence organisation and military preparedness: The Landdrosts of Stellenbosch and Swellendam were reminded of the military responsibility of the inhabitants in their districts in the case of an *algemeen opontbod* or a general call-up. All burghers that were not yet part of the militia had to join immediately. The Post Holders in Simon's Bay, Robben Island and Saldanha Bay were told that provisions, livestock

⁹⁶ NAN 1.01.50 – 1192, Van Plettenberg – Stadhouder, 20/4/1781.

⁹⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 2/4/1781, pp.44-5.

⁹⁸ F. Duminy and J.M. Duminy, *Duminy Dagboeke*, pp.13-4.

⁹⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783, I*, Inkomende Brieven, *Heeren XVII* – Van Plettenberg, 7/12/1782, p.391.

¹⁰⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 2/4/1781, pp.42-52.

and draught animals should not fall into enemy hands.¹⁰¹ If an enemy appeared, they had to move the above-mentioned into the interior or destroy it, while a horse rider had to warn the Cape immediately. Non-compliance could carry the death penalty. All prisoners and livestock on Robben Island had to be brought to the Cape and only a corporal and two men would remain on the island. If an enemy appeared they had to spike their guns and set the buildings alight. In order to facilitate wartime logistics and provide for the possibility of having a large body of men concentrated at one point, it was decided that as much biscuit as possible for billet purposes had to be baked, and it had to be provided to the Landdrosts in the districts and to the Independent Fiscal at the Cape. An effort was made to bolster the Garrison by recalling soldiers not on active duty, and appointing additional officers.¹⁰² (See the ensuing discussion.)

The lacking defences of the Cape was not only a concern to the Cape, but was also worrying to the VOC Governor-General in Batavia, W.A. Alting. Van Plettenberg was convinced that the French had much interest in keeping the Cape in Dutch hands and the day after the news of the war arrived, he asked to Vicomte De Souillac (the French Governor of Mauritius and Reunion or the Isle de France and Bourbon as they were known) for military assistance in the form of heavy artillery, equipment, and gunners.¹⁰³ Alting and Van Plettenberg were very relieved when De Souillac assured them that French assistance for the defence of the Cape would be forthcoming (at least 1200 troops and equipment)¹⁰⁴ and Alting thanked De Souillac for the crucial French assistance.¹⁰⁵ From their correspondence it is clear that their initial assessment was that a Dutch-French naval force would arrive from Europe to conduct combined operations in the East.¹⁰⁶ In reality this never happened, and France was the main actor, while the Dutch became the beneficiary of French military support and protection.

With rumours of a possible British onslaught on the Cape abounding, the burghers (of *Patriotte* persuasion) were strongly anti-British and pro-French. J.G. van Reenen wrote on 15 April 1781 that after they received news of the war, everything was in "Rep en Roer" and preparations were made to repulse a British attack. They were not going to just hand over the

¹⁰¹ CA C1776, Uitgaande Brieven, Numerous letters from the Council of Policy to the various Post Holders, 2/4/1781, pp.11-7.

¹⁰² NAN 1.01.50 – 1192, Van Plettenberg – Stadhouders, 20/4/1781; and *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 2/4/1781, pp.42-4 and 49.

¹⁰³ NAN 1.01.50 – 1192, Van Plettenberg – Stadhouders, 20/4/1781; and *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Secreete Particuliere Brieven, Van Plettenberg – De Souillac, 1/4/1781, pp.252-3.

¹⁰⁴ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Aanhangel tot de Bylagen tot de Resolutiën van den Politicquen Raad, De Souillac – Alting, 8/7/1781, pp.111-2.

¹⁰⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Aanhangel, Alting – De Souillac, 30/12/1781, p.115.

¹⁰⁶ See the correspondence between Alting and De Souillac, 30/9/1781 and 30/12/1781 in *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Aanhangel, pp.115-121.

Cape to the British, and were prepared to put up a tough fight: “dat wij niet genegen zijn om ons tot een geringen prijs aan Engeland oor te geven, zal hij meer tegenstand vinden dan hij verwacht, en gewaar worden dat de Africaansche dapperheid en beleid niet voor de woede en heerschzugt der Engelschen behoeft te Zwigten”.¹⁰⁷

Very anxious weeks passed at the Cape, while they were gearing themselves up for a possible British attack. But as Van Plettenberg wrote to the Stadtholder, he trusted that they were aware of the poor defences of the Cape in the Netherlands, and that a relief force was on its way. They placed much hope on French assistance because the French islands in the Indian Ocean depended on provisions from the Cape for their military and naval forces.¹⁰⁸

Spirits rose when Christoffel Brandt¹⁰⁹ (Post Holder in Simon’s Bay) reported the arrival of the French warship *Le Serapis* (48), which departed from Brest on 23 February, in Simon’s Bay on Sunday 20 May. Her Captain, Chevalier De Roche, brought the good news that in accordance with an alliance between the Dutch Republic and France, a French task force with 3000 troops were on its way to assist with the defence of the Cape. But it was also known that the British had equipped a force to take the Cape. They did not know the whereabouts of the British force, as it was possible that they might have sailed to the West Indies instead.¹¹⁰ Van Plettenberg seemed so elated by the good news that he travelled to Simon’s Bay to speak to De Roche in person on 23 May.

At about 22:00 that evening Monsieur De Mouchy Percheron (who was a French representative at the Cape during the Seven Years War) arrived by boat in Table Bay. He departed from Brest on 16 March onboard the French frigate *Le Fine* (36), but due to contrary winds, he disembarked 10 to 15 miles from the coast and sailed to the Cape in a ship’s boat, while *Le Fine* sailed to False Bay. Percheron brought letters from the *Heeren XVII* and a letter to the Governor of the Cape from the French Naval Minister, the Marquis de Castries. It concerned the appointment of a French Intendant of Mauritius, M. de Chevreau (who was onboard *Le Fine*), as well as Percheron’s appointment as a French Agent at the Cape.¹¹¹ When De Chevreau arrived from False Bay by coach, late at night on 25 May, he received a nine-gun salute and was welcomed by a guard of honour at the Castle.¹¹² De Chevreau and Percheron had to make the

¹⁰⁷ J.G. van Reenen, 15/4/1781, quoted in G. Wagenaar, Johannes Gysbertus van Reenen, p.164.

¹⁰⁸ NAN 1.01.50 – 1192, Van Plettenberg – Stadhouder, 20/4/1781.

¹⁰⁹ Though Christoffel Brandt is often referred to by the fancy title of VOC Resident in Simon’s Bay in Cape documents, the VOC did not acknowledge it and referred to him as “Posthouder”.

¹¹⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Inkomende Brieven, Brandt – Van Plettenberg, 20/5/1781, and Dagregister 20/5/1781, pp.316-7 and 244.

¹¹¹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 24/5/1781 and Dagregister 23/5/1781, pp.80-1 and 245.

¹¹² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister 255/1781, p.245.

necessary arrangements with the Cape authorities for the French troops and naval squadron that was destined to arrive at the Cape. Much to his relief no doubt, Van Plettenberg took the opportunity to announce in the Council of Policy meeting that “een Fransch Esquador oorlog Scheepen met een aanzienlijke aantal Troepen herwaards gezonden stond te worden, ten einde deeze Plaats, tegen alle Vijandelijke onderneemingen der Engelschen te beschermen”.¹¹³

The passages of the French warships, *Le Sylphide*, *Le Serapis* and *Le Fine*, from France to the Cape, were fast compared to the average length of such passages at the time and supports the accepted belief that French ships were generally fine, well-constructed ships that took to the sea well. The quick French reaction and the fact that they despatched warships to warn the Cape was of value to the defenders. It gave them time to improve the defences and to prepare for receiving the French military and naval reinforcements. By comparison the VOC chartered the *Prins van Lingen*, with Swen Jansen as Captain, expressly to take the news of the war to the Cape as quickly as possible. The *Prins van Lingen* sailed from Oostende on 20 January, but due to a serious leak she had to put into Dartmouth. She eventually arrived at the Cape on 10 July with orders from the VOC to prepare the defences of the Cape and warn Batavia.¹¹⁴ Fortunately for the Cape, the French were involved.

Preparations for the war also extended beyond Cape Town. Simon's Bay was important as a winter harbour, but had no defences. It was placed on a war-footing and Brandt was reminded that if an enemy appeared he had to move into the interior with horses, cattle, provision and everything which might be of use to an enemy.¹¹⁵ An officer and 52 soldiers were despatched to Simon's Bay and lookouts were placed in False Bay and at Cape Point to watch the sea. A signal was also agreed upon in case of the arrival of ships.

The farm Ravensteijn (currently Camp's Bay) southwest of Lion's Head belonged to a former army officer J.J.L. Warnich who, with great difficulty, created a road over Kloofnek to Cape Town. When the war broke out, it belonged to one Van Camptz (or Von Kamptz) who married Warnich's widow and went to Europe to finalize his affairs, but he got stuck in Europe for the duration of the war. With its long sandy beach Kamptz Bay was a possible amphibious landing site and the farm had to be destroyed to prevent an invader from finding water and supplies there. The farm buildings became a military post and the militia as well as Khoi troops had to do picket duty at Kamptz Bay. The road to the Cape was broken up to prevent an enemy from dragging artillery up to Kloofnek, from where it was possible to dominate Cape Town and to

¹¹³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 24/5/1781, pp.80-1.

¹¹⁴ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister, 10/7/1781, p.256.

¹¹⁵ CA C1776, Uitgaande Brieven, Van Plettenberg – Brandt, 2/4/1781, pp.11-3.

control the signal system hinging on Leeuwenkop.¹¹⁶ The post house in Kloofnek was improved and somewhat fortified as it was regarded of military value for the defence of the Cape. A small detachment of soldiers was deployed here to defend the road from Camps Bay.

Before the military reinforcements destined for the Cape departed, the VOC Committee for Secret Affairs prepared plans for the defence of the Cape, stipulated how the cooperation with the French reinforcements should take place and ordered Van Plettenberg to provide all necessary support and assistance to the French naval and military contingents.¹¹⁷ But as the possibility existed that the British expedition might arrive at the Cape first and successfully conquer it, they had to consider the various courses of action to be taken in such an eventuality. If Cape Town was captured and the defending troops were forced to retreat inland, Van Plettenberg was ordered to keep a lookout to the sea and warn the approaching ships with fires on the Blaauwberg and Oostwal, as the ships received orders that they had to proceed to Saldanha Bay if an enemy was in control of Cape Town.¹¹⁸

The Committee for Secret Affairs also issued precise orders to the Captains of the ships as well as to the Commanding Officers of the military reinforcements. The Captain of the first ship to arrive at the Cape had to establish its status, and if he was sure that the Cape was in enemy hands, they had to proceed to Saldanha Bay and disembark the troops there. They then had to make contact with the Governor, await orders and take in provision if possible. If the whole region was under enemy control, the first ship to arrive in Cape waters had to cruise at the height of Saldanha Bay and warn approaching ships.¹¹⁹

The orders to the military commanders stipulated that they had to go to Saldanha Bay in such an eventually, land their troops in the Hoedjiesbaaij and make contact with the burghers Gildenhuissen and Henske in Saldanha Bay as well as the other burghers in the area. They also had to collect as many horses, transport and provisions as possible from the Honigklip, Witteklip and Picquetberg areas for logistics purposes. If they had sufficient supplies, they had to make contact with the Cape forces or the remnants of it, link-up with them and conduct operations.¹²⁰

The orders also suggested how a campaign should be conducted in the interior. If the Cape forces were forced to withdraw, they could retreat behind the Berg River and should then

¹¹⁶ D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, p.285.

¹¹⁷ NAN VOC4536, Rapport van de bewindhebber J. Graafland aan de Heeren XVII betreffende de verrichtingen van de secrete committee, 9/7/1781.

¹¹⁸ NAN VOC4537, Geheime Commissie – Goeverneur van de Kaap, 4/5/1781.

¹¹⁹ NAN VOC4537, Instructie voor den eersten gezagvoerder van het Schip't geen uyt Spanjen zal vertrecken, 22/4/1781.

¹²⁰ NAN VOC4537, Instructie voor den Officieren die na de gedaane landing de troepen sal commandeeren, 22/4/1781.

try to defend it as a frontier, while trying to maintain contact with the coast (and ships). If it was not possible, they had to move further into the interior. Ample provisions were to be found in the Roodezand and Wagenmakersvalleij area and since only two passes to the interior existed through the mountains, these passes should be well defended. Other alternatives would be to retreat to the Vogelvalleij and the Wintershoekskloof (to the farm of one De Waal) or even to the Bokkeveld region behind Roodezand, which is surrounded by high mountains and is connected with only one pass through the Winterberge. If they retreated into the interior, contact had to be maintained with the inhabitants of the Saldanha Bay area and the coast to facilitate covert contact with ships. Finally, if the Cape was not in Dutch hands, they had to cut all the communications between the interior and Cape Town and allow no cattle or provisions to reach the Cape.¹²¹ From these orders it is evident that the outlook in the boardrooms of the Committee for Secret Affairs was not to hand over the Cape on a platter; it had to take place with a fight! But was this the type of defence their military commanders were prepared to conduct? Time would tell – the real test was only to come more than a decade later.

4.2. The System of Fortifications

After Gilquin arrived at the Cape he immediately tackled his responsibility in a determined manner. He gave his first secret report on the status of the fortifications to Van Plettenberg in May 1779. In it he expressed his utter disgust and dismay with the true nature of the defences and the condition of some of the old and rusted guns on the fortifications, stating:

“... eenen Seer Slegten en onbruikbaare toestand ... oude Ysere Stukken Canon bestaande, waar meede het gevaarlyk zoude zyn geweest eenige Serieuse Schooten, te doen, en geensints Raadsaam daar op eenig vertrouwen te Stellen ... in Cas van Vyandelyke attacque, iets weesenlyks tot de defensie te kunnen uytregten ... de Ysere Stukken ... zoo sterk of geroest of afgeschilvert waaren, dat de ondergeteekende Sig niet herinnert ooyt iets diergelyks in 't vaderland gesien te hebben ...”¹²²

So, with many guns corroded and in a bad state, all guns had to be tested to make sure that they were not dangerous to use and to prevent a tragic accident. When seven of the suspect iron guns on the *Chavonnes Battery* were tested, six burst, while the one that survived was also not considered safe. Gilquin suggested that due to the Cape weather and the fact that the batteries were on the seashore iron guns had a limited life, and had to be tested every ten years.

¹²¹ NAN VOC4537, Instructie voor den Officieren die na de gedaane landing de troepen sal commandeeren, 22/4/1781.

¹²² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Uitgaande Secreete Brieven, Gilquin – Van Plettenberg, 15/5/1779, pp.291-2.

He requested at least forty new guns (twenty 24-pounders and twenty 12-pounders) and 20000 cannonballs.¹²³ Van Plettenberg supported Gilquin's proposals, recommended it to the *Heeren XVII* and added that the cannonballs they had, were also rusted.¹²⁴

In a subsequent secret report, Gilquin stated that the artillery was "in eenen seer gedelabreeden of vervallen toestand..." and with a commander, two officers, five NCO's and 24 artillerymen, the artillery could in no way conduct a proper defence. In an emergency they were divided between the various fortifications, while in actual fact they were too few to even properly man only the *Chavonnes Battery* with its 16 guns. Gilquin recommended that the artillery establishment at the Cape be augmented with five officers (one Captain-Lieutenant, two Lieutenants and two Ensigns), twelve NCO's and 200 artillerymen. Only two engineering officers at the Cape were insufficient and he suggested that it should be five, as the fortifications required urgent improvement. To ask for fewer reinforcements would constitute a serious neglect of his duty and undermine the defence of the Cape, since it was obvious to anybody with military knowledge that the defence of this "Importante Colonie" was very lacking.¹²⁵ The establishment of a "Kweekschool" or an academy at the Cape where engineers could be trained for service in the East, should also be considered.

Gilquin emphasised that proper coastal defences and a strong artillery corps were important prerequisites for the defence of the Cape against a maritime threat. If enough attention was not given to this, it could be a serious blunder as the Cape was virtually defenceless and its fixed defences, Artillery Corps and engineering dispensation, were in a poor and neglected condition. Van Plettenberg had to take serious notice of his submissions, he stressed, as he had much professional knowledge and understood the important role artillery had to play "in 't defendeeren van Landings-plaatsen, Forten, Lignes, en andere vesting werken, en hoe nootsakelyk deselve alhier voor al tot afkeeringe van vyandelyke Scheepen is".¹²⁶ It is evident that Gilquin immediately wished to place the artillery and engineering dispensation at the Cape on a firmer footing, but what was really essential, was men and material, which implied cash – something the VOC did not part with easily.

By October 1779 the full-time maintenance and support structure for the fortifications consisted of one engineering officer, one NCO and only 21 fortification workers. The Artillery

¹²³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Uitgaande Secreete Brieven, Gilquin – Van Plettenberg, 15/5/1779, pp.291-3.

¹²⁴ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Uitgaande Secreete Brieven, Van Plettenberg – *Heeren XVII*, 22/5/1779, p.290.

¹²⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Uitgaande Secreete Brieven, Gilquin – Van Plettenberg, 20/6/1779, pp.294-5.

Corps at the Cape, responsible for serving and controlling the guns, had two officers, five NCO's and 23 artillerists.¹²⁷ These men were apparently quite proficient and handled their guns well, but as Gilquin had quite rightly pointed out, they were too few to even serve one large battery properly.

The constant exposure to the sea air was not only bad for the iron guns at the Cape, but the sea-facing walls of the batteries, gun platforms and gun-carriages were also in a poor state and required constant maintenance.¹²⁸ By 1780 the Castle needed urgent repair work and the weapons workshops were getting very dilapidated. As a result a new building for the weapons workshops had to be erected.¹²⁹ In November 1780 the *Heeren XVII* approved the construction of two new powder magazines and storehouses, while the Amsterdam and Zeeland *Kamers* had to provide the additional guns, ammunition, bombs, cannonballs, grenades and gunpowder.¹³⁰ In September the VOC Committee for Secret Affairs asked Gilquin to report on the shortcomings in the Cape defences and on the lack of fortifications in False Bay.¹³¹ They also stated that they agree with the urgency requirement for a new battery in the vicinity of 's *Heer Hendriks Kinderen*. The project was approved by the *Heeren XVII* two months later.¹³²

To prevent possible landings in the small bay (Three Anchor Bay) to the west of the *Chavonnes Battery* an earthen rampart or barbette battery was erected provisionally in 1779 to place guns on, in case of an emergency. A redoubt did exist here earlier, but was removed. After news of the war was received in April 1781 an earthen barbette battery armed with five guns was erected at the so-called Oude Mouille. Its purpose was to deliver harassing fire to sailing ships that passed into the bay, as ships entering the bay would often be within its range for a while.¹³³

Not much money was spent on fortifications as it was essentially only routine expenses. Despite the war between Britain and France and the increasing international tension, the amount became f6355 in 1778-79 as more slaves worked on the fortifications after Gilquin's arrival. With

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1779*, Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Gouverneur Generaal en Raden, 2/10/1779, pp.414-5.

¹²⁸ CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, pp.34-5.

¹²⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1780*, Resolutiën, 8/8/1780, p.61.

¹³⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Inkomende Secreete Brieven, *Heeren XVII* – Van Plettenberg, 10/11/1780, pp.184-6.

¹³¹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Inkomende Secreete Brieven, Gecommitteerde Bewindhebberen en Gemagtigden van Vergadering van 17'en tot de Secreete Zaken – Van Plettenberg, 26/9/1780, p.171.

¹³² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Inkomende Secreete Brieven, *Heeren XVII* – Van Plettenberg, 10/11/1780, pp.184-6.

¹³³ CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, pp.21-2.

30 slaves working on the fortifications around the Castle and doing repair work to gun carriages, it rose to f9870 in 1779-80. By 1780-81, 40 slaves were working full time on the fortifications and repair work continued, and the amount was f15081. However, it climbed dramatically when war broke out and during 1781-82, as new construction work commenced, it suddenly became f63552 (ten times more than in 1778-79).¹³⁴

The Dutch did commence with improving the defences and though their efforts were not dramatic, some French officers thought they actually achieved much, considering the few resources they had available.¹³⁵ The well-known traveller Le Valliant stated that many of the inhabitants of Cape Town, their servants and slaves assisted in the process of erecting crucial new defences after news of the war arrived. This however, was of short duration and later the burghers did not come off their own accord, but only send their slaves.¹³⁶ Fortunately for the defenders of the Cape, their weak defences were not put to the ultimate test due to the arrival of French support. With French assistance, the creation of fixed defences received new impetus.

4.3. The Garrison and Militia Forces

When Gordon took over as *Hoofd der Militie* it seems that it was an improvement in more than one way. In their deputations to the VOC, the burghers objected to Van Prehn's conduct. He apparently used the equipment and machines in the workshop of the arsenal to produce items such as furniture and gold and silver work, which he then offered for sale with cloth, material and even gunpowder – most probably from Company stock!¹³⁷

After Van Prehn retired in February 1780, Gordon and the Council of Policy were anxious for the VOC to confirm Gordon's appointment and promotion¹³⁸ as the military organisation at the Cape was confused at the time. Gordon was unsure about his status and exactly what his post entailed. As a Captain Gordon was in command of the Garrison (13 officers and 418 other ranks), while Gilquin, a Major, was in charge of 50 or so men (32 artillerists, one engineer and 22

¹³⁴ See the annual financial reports in the resolutions of the Council of Policy, C157, 7/2/1779; C158, 16/12/1780; C160, 18/2/1781; and C164, 18/2/1783; in <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹³⁵ *Military Observations on the Existing Conditions of the Cape of Good Hope* in A.B. Smith, 'A Report on Excavations at Conway Redoubt', *SA Military History Journal* 5(3) 1981, p.111.

¹³⁶ F. le Valliant, *Reize in de Binnelanden van Afrika, Langs de Kaap De Goede Hoop*, Volume III, pp.xiii-iv.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ C1174 Requesten, Gordon – Council of Policy, 2/3/1780, pp.78-9; and C1769 Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – *Heeren XVII*, 9/3/1780, pp.37-9.

fortification workers) and actually had to report to him.¹³⁹ The issue of his exact military authority, responsibilities and the chain of command was a burning one, which caused confusion and conflict, specifically after the arrival of foreign troops. Despite numerous requests, Van Plettenberg seemed unwilling, incapable or too uncertain to take the proper action and settle the matter in a way that was militarily correct. Consequently they had to await an answer from the VOC which, due to the war, took years.

As military order and efficiency at the time depended heavily on strict discipline, the laxness within the military establishment at the Cape had caused discipline to deteriorate. When Gordon took over, the Governor ordered him to upgrade and renew the *Reglement* or Standing Orders of the Garrison and to make sure that it was in line with the laws of the Dutch Republic and the practices of the VOC. Gordon set to work and typical of such documents, the reworked *Reglement* was a code of conduct that defined the responsibilities and duties of the soldiers at the Cape. It emphasised maintaining proper military discipline, as the Council stated, “door goede wetten en Reglementen een behoorlijke en Stricte discipline onder het Militair Guarnisoen deezes Gouvernements t’onderhouden”.¹⁴⁰ Soldiers had to be well acquainted with the *Reglement*, which was done by exposing them to its stipulations on a regular basis.

After he took over command Gordon did much to improve the military set-up in a variety of ways; from asking for more and better quality muskets, to new tents and fortifications. When he inspected the armoury he was perturbed about the condition of weapons and equipment. In April 1780 he requested 1200 new muskets of the type the Dutch Army used. He also requested that the armoury be improved and new powder magazines created. The Committee for Secret Affairs concurred with his requests and in a letter to Van Plettenberg (dated September 1780, it reached the Cape in January 1781) they stated that it would be submitted to the *Heeren XVII*.¹⁴¹ The *Heeren XVII* approved the request for new powder magazines in November 1780 and ordered the Amsterdam and Zeeland *Kamers* to provide the 1200 muskets and ammunition.¹⁴² The war, however, interrupted the delivery of the muskets and during the years that followed, Gordon would constantly request new and better weapons. The musket situation is another indication of the dire condition of the Cape Garrison when war broke out.

¹³⁹ See CA C1772, Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Governor-General and High Council, 13/11/1780, p.88.

¹⁴⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1780*, Resolutiën, 22/8/1780, p.62.

¹⁴¹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Inkomende Secreete Brieven, Gecommitteerde Bewindhebberen en Gemagtigden van Vergadering van 17'en tot de Secreete Zaken – Van Plettenberg, 26/9/1780, p.172.

¹⁴² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Inkomende Secreete Brieven, *Heeren XVII* – Van Plettenberg, 10/11/1780, pp.184-6.

During the years before the war, the VOC did not provide the Cape with the ammunition quantities they required and shortages existed well before the outbreak of the war.¹⁴³ Through the years, the Cape authorities often asked for additional gunpowder and in July 1780, they urgently requested a further 50 000 lbs (about 22680 kg) as they had to send nearly 4000 kg of old and spoiled gunpowder to Batavia.¹⁴⁴ Four days after *Le Sylphide* brought the news of the war, the shortage of gunpowder and lead for cannonballs, resulted in the Council of Policy requesting gunpowder from Batavia, Ceylon and also from the French Governor on Mauritius.¹⁴⁵ In an effort to alleviate the immediate situation, 4000 lbs (about 1800kg) of gunpowder and more than 20240 lbs (about 9180kg) of lead ("schuijt-of handloot") were taken from the cargo of the ship *Diamant*, 2500 lbs (about 1134 kg) gunpowder was lifted from the ship *Mercur*, while 3000 lbs (about 1361 kg) gunpowder and 60 muskets with bayonets and ammunition bags were taken from the ship *Vriendschap*.¹⁴⁶ A few months later (in October) the Cape Government even purchased 11533 lbs (about 5232 kg) lead from the Danish merchantmen, *Prins Carel*, in Simon's Bay.¹⁴⁷

Very telling of the more informed perception at the Cape, is a letter (by an unknown author) written to Swellengrebel in January 1780, containing complaints about the shortage of company officials and soldiers – they had captains without troops. The Cape was of great importance to the VOC and was becoming more so by the day, but was poorly defended. Perhaps, the letter writer asked, King Frederick II of Prussia could provide the Cape with some mercenary regiments, since they would soon have to defend the Cape against an attack aimed at conquering it.¹⁴⁸

Sufficient soldiers were always a problem – to the VOC and at the Cape. In February 1778 the Cape despatched 200 soldiers to the East due to an urgent request from Ceylon, but when a similar request was received a year later (April 1779) the Council of Policy declined, as

¹⁴³ See for example *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Bylagen, Bevinding op de Negotie Boeken van Cabo de Goede Hoop d'A'o 1775/6 ..., pp.447 and 453.

¹⁴⁴ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Bylagen, Extract uijt den Eijsch van Behoeften voor de Caab voor den Jaare 1781 ..., 23/7/1780, p.472; and *Uitgaande Brieven, Van Plettenberg – Goeveneur Generaal en de Raden*, 7/3/1781, p.393.

¹⁴⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 31/3/1781, p.42.

¹⁴⁶ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 10/4/1781, p.53; and *Uitgaande Brieven, Van Plettenberg – Goeveneur Generaal en de Raden*, 30/4/1781, pp.407-8.

¹⁴⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 27/8/1781, p.120.

¹⁴⁸ *Briefwisseling van Hendrik Swellengrebel Jr oor Kaapse Sake*, Letter from the Cape – Swellengrebel, 10/1/1780 pp.100-1.

the Cape also experienced a shortage of soldiers.¹⁴⁹ Clearly, greater awareness of the changing security environment existed and in September 1779 and because of the shortage of soldiers, the High Council of the Indies decided to raise soldiers' salaries.¹⁵⁰

In October 1778 the infantry consisted of a Commanding Officer (officially a Major's post), 14 officers (three captains, one captain-lieutenant, four lieutenants and six ensigns), and 409 soldiers and other ranks (including 11 bandsmen). At the same time the artillery only mustered two officers, five NCO's and 23 artillerists. A year later, with an escalating war between France and Britain, the only difference was a dozen or so more infantrymen and one additional artillerist.¹⁵¹ During 1780 the strength of the garrison remained constant. Shortly before the outbreak of the war, by November 1780, the infantry consisted of thirteen officers, 44 NCO's and 383 other ranks (440 in total). The artillery at the same time had three officers, five NCO's and 24 artillerists (32 in total).¹⁵²

In April 1780 Van Plettenberg ordered Gordon to bring the Garrison up to battalion strength with at least 400 men under arms. As a result the leave of all *pasgangers* was immediately revoked and they had to report for military duty at the Castle, while soldiers working in other VOC sections (a few artisans and those working in the hospital) were immediately transferred back to the garrison. Because of a shortage of officers in the garrison, Gordon requested the Council of Policy to appoint additional officers to improve the command and control efficacy and military preparedness of the Garrison. On 4 April 1781 four of the officers in Garrison were promoted, while four Sergeants were commissioned as Ensigns.¹⁵³ Though these measures were important at the time and filled the gaps, they probably also caused problems. It is reasonable to assume that soldiers working out of the regimental system for a while (in this case as *pasgangers* or artisans) were less committed and had a poorer degree of military readiness on the resumption of their military duties. The usual pattern in the military would be to retrain such soldiers. In addition, it is not regarded as the best option to appoint officers from the ranks. This is due to the unique demands of the military profession and the difference in status

¹⁴⁹ See *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1778*, Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Gouverneur General, 16/2/1778, p.315; and *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1779*, Resolutiën, 20/4/1779 and 6/7/1779, pp.48 and 80.

¹⁵⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1780*, Extract uit de Notulen van het geresolveerde in Raade van Indië, 7/9/1779 p.381.

¹⁵¹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1778*, Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Gouverneur General, 10/10/1778, pp.415-7; and *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1779*, Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Goeveneur Generaal en de Raden, 2/10/1779, pp.414-5.

¹⁵² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1780*, Uitgaande Brieven, Van Plettenberg – Heeren XVII, 9/3/1780, Council of Policy – Goeveneur Generaal en de Raden, 13/11/1780 and Dagregister, 30/6/1780, pp.150, 260 and 359-60.

between officers and other ranks; which is why officer cadets were ideally commissioned as officers and NCO's did not become officers after years of service. In both cases however, the authorities at the Cape had no other choice.

The militia consisted of the VOC officials, sailors and the burgher militia of Cape Town and the districts. More-or-less 650 officials, artisans and recuperating sailors worked in the VOC offices, yard, stores and workshops in and around the Cape. They also had to assist with the defence of the colony and the *Equipagemeester*, D.H. Staring, was in command of the sailors and artisans. However, he was disliked by the burghers due to rumours of his involvement in irregularities. To improve the leadership of the militia as part of the general preparations for war, a number of promotions and new appointments were also made.¹⁵⁴ In total about 1100 men could be mustered for the defence of Cape Town, while it was thought that roughly a further 3000 men were scattered over a vast area. As they were heavily involved in protecting their herds and farms against San raids and the Xhosa, not more than a fourth would probably be mobilised in time of crisis.¹⁵⁵

To support the Garrison in their military responsibilities, orders for assistance went out to the districts on 2 April 1781. The Landdrost of Stellenbosch had to despatch 100 burgher cavalymen (dragoons) from Stellenbosch and Drakensteijn to the Cape, while a detachment of 50 burgher cavalry had to be detached from Swellendam. Detachments of equal strength had to be prepared to replace those at the Cape after a month.¹⁵⁶ Landdrost O.G. de Wet of Stellenbosch indicated that they would supply 80 armed men, while Landdrost D. van Rijnveld stated that Swellendam would send 50 men, but due to local security problems it would be difficult to provide more assistance.¹⁵⁷ The system of duty commenced and the detachments were exchanged on a monthly basis.

The Burghers from Stellenbosch and Drakensteijn soon complained that though it was expected of everybody to do duties, the duty roster was not fair. Often a father and son would have to do duty in the same period, while it was a problem for many farmers to leave their farms completely alone, as they feared for the safety of their families and important agriculture production had to continue. They did not mind to do military service, but would like to know that

¹⁵³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister, 4/4/1781, p.233.

¹⁵⁴ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 2/4/1781, pp.47-8.

¹⁵⁵ G.M. Theal, *History and Ethnography*, III, pp.187-8.

¹⁵⁶ CA C1776, Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy to the Landrosts in Stellenbosch and Swellendam, 2/4/1781, pp.380-2. See also *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 31/3/1781 and Dagregister 31/5/1781, pp.41 and 247.

¹⁵⁷ CA C159, Resolutiën, 20/4/1781, pp.287-9; and C550, Inkomende Brieven, Van Rijnveld – Van Plettenberg, 7/4/1781, pp.122-3.

their homes were safe while serving in the Cape. It was therefore important that enough men capable of doing military service, stay behind for the protection of farms. The Council of Policy decided that it was the responsibility of the Landdrost and *Burgherkrijgsraad* of Stellenbosch and Drakenstein to make the necessary arrangements and ensure that duties are fairly distributed.¹⁵⁸

Though the burghers were unhappy with Van Plettenberg's administration, they were prepared to defend the Cape and were loyal to the Netherlands. Van Plettenberg wrote to the Stadtholder that though the Cape was divided by internal strife and bickering, the fact that burghers immediately gave their support to the defence of the Cape was assuring as in times of crisis they stood together: "ter afweering van een vijand kan en moet bij den hand worden genomen".¹⁵⁹

4.4. The Creation of a Khoi Unit

The military capabilities of the VOC were simply too insignificant to be able to control its large trade empire and achieve its objectives without local assistance. They utilised whatever local assistance they could to maintain their interest; be it trading agreements, military agreements, collaboration, labour or military support from the local populations. The VOC relied heavily on locally raised soldiers and levies. Local soldiers served as regular soldiers in the service of the VOC, they were the troops of allies that cooperated with the VOC, or they were troops mobilised for specific campaigns.¹⁶⁰

Asiatic soldiers were much cheaper than European soldiers (about half the cost by the late eighteenth century). Such soldiers were frequently not trained in the practices of western warfare and were not equipped with firearms, but maintained their own way of fighting and used the traditional weapons they were well acquainted with – often shock weapons like swords or lances. As a result, operational and tactical differences existed between local troops and VOC troops. Local troops were found to be well suited for hit-and-run actions and regularly scouted ahead of the main force, or acted as skirmishers. By the late eighteenth century locally raised troops from the kampongs of Batavia still functioned without formal drill, without uniforms and without firearms. At the same time the VOC often recruited troops in India, the *sipahis* (*sepoys*),

¹⁵⁸ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolusiën, 1/5/1781, pp.73-6.

¹⁵⁹ NAN 1.01.50 – 1192, Van Plettenberg – Stadhouder, 20/4/1781.

¹⁶⁰ R. Raben, 'Het Aziatisch Legioen' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, pp.181 and 197.

that often had good military experience they gained in the numerous wars in India, while they were armed and trained in the western way of war.¹⁶¹

At the Cape, armed Khoi members participating in commandos were a common occurrence during the eighteenth century, but they were not organised as a regular military unit before the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War. By the late eighteenth century the use of armed Khoi in the event of an attack, was part-and-parcel of the defence planning at the Cape as is clearly illustrated in a report by Van Prehn dated 1772. Van Prehn stated that between 200 and 300 muskets must be kept at the magazine in Stellenbosch to arm the Khoi that were proficient in handling muskets if the Cape was suddenly overrun and a defence must be conducted eastward of the Salt River. However, there was no actual effort to create a Khoi military unit.¹⁶²

After war was declared the Cape authorities realised that the Garrison was too small and that it would be futile to wait for reinforcements from the Netherlands. The militia had an important role to play in the defence, but they could not be kept mobilised for too long. A solution was to use Khoi members that were proficient with muskets, as it was thought they would adapt to military service with relative ease. In order to establish the numbers of Khoi that could be called up, all burghers had to annually provide the government with lists of the Khoi and persons of mixed blood ("bastaard") in their service.¹⁶³ As the Council Policy was convinced that the Khoi and persons of mixed blood would be useful to the defence of the Cape, they decided on 2 April to order burghers to send all the Khoi and those of mixed blood that were in their service and were good at handling a musket, to the Cape for military service: "...veele warden gevonden die expert met het Schietgeweer weeten om te gaan, en van dewelke men gevolgelijk vooral met het bezetten en defendeeren der defilees zeer goede diensten zal kunnen hebben ... ten spoedigsten herwaards te zenden ten eijnde te kunnen worden g'employeerd daarsulx nodig zal worden bevonden...".¹⁶⁴ If burghers could also supply muskets, the Council undertook to refund them, or return it.

By 10 April 1781 the first recruits were formed into a light infantry unit called the "Corps Bastaard Hottentotten".¹⁶⁵ The government had to provide all the equipment, clothing and food for the unit and by the beginning of May it already mustered 400 men. They had to be trained for service in False Bay, Hout Bay and around the Cape Peninsula, and were later posted to different

¹⁶¹ R. Raben, 'Het Aziatisch Legioen' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, pp.183 and 196-200.

¹⁶² J. de Villiers, *Hottentot-Regimente aan die Kaap, 1781-1806*, p.2.

¹⁶³ J. de Villiers, *Hottentot-Regimente aan die Kaap*, p.4.

¹⁶⁴ CA C159, Resolutiën, 2/4/1781, p.223-4.

¹⁶⁵ CA C159, Resolutiën, 10/4/1781, pp.238-9.

locations.¹⁶⁶ The difference between the Cape and the East was that Khoi members serving in the commandos used firearms and the soldiers of the Khoi unit were also equipped with firearms and not local weapons, yet they were not provided with VOC uniforms.¹⁶⁷ This was probably due to the fact that many of the Khoi were proficient with firearms, while in the East complex indigenous military systems existed that had evolved over a long period of time and it was important to have troops that were expert in the local way of fighting. It was not the same with the military system of the local Khoi.

The officers of the *Corps Bastaard Hottentoten* were members of the militia and Hendrik Oostwald Eksteen, a former lieutenant in the militia infantry, as well as Gerrit Munnik, a former “Heemraad”, were appointed as “Kommandanten”, in the corps, a rank equivalent to Captain. The appointed “onderkommandante” (equivalent to ensign) was Alexander van Breda and Jeremias Auret.¹⁶⁸

According to Hendrik Cloete (renowned owner of Groot Constantia) 200 troops of the “Korps Hottentotte en Basters” deployed at Muizenberg were well-trained and under the command of Gerrit Munnik and Jeremias Auret, while another 200 men were deployed at Hout Bay under the command of Hendrik Eksteen (or Hendrik Eksteen Pieters) and Alexander van Breda. These two were, however, dismissed for maltreatment of the troops, and the whole unit (about 400 strong) were placed under the command of Munnik.¹⁶⁹ From Cloete’s notes it appears that this might have happened around July 1781. De Villiers indicated that by 12 February 1782 the Corps had only one *Kommandant*, Munnik, while Auret and Jacobus Cornelis Schiettekate were its ensigns – Eksteen and Van Breda were out of service. The reasons were not known and the minutes of the *Burgherkrijgsraad* also do not provide any detail.¹⁷⁰

Though these soldiers could probably only act as heavy infantry in battle, the Corps was specifically formed to fulfil the typical roles of light infantry such as scouting, skirmishing and picket duty, roles at which they could excel due to their local knowledge. Based on their lacking ability on the parade ground, Le Valliant doubted the military effectiveness of the Khoi troops in a conventional battle and thought that they would not stand one British salvo before fleeing. Yet, he stated that the Khoi did not adhere to the same fighting methods as the Europeans, relying on

¹⁶⁶ CA C2347, *Memorien en Instructien*, 1/5/1781, p.79.

¹⁶⁷ R. Raben, ‘Het Aziatisch Legioen’ in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, pp.183 and 203.

¹⁶⁸ CA C2347, *Memorien en Instructien*, 1/5/1781, p.79.

¹⁶⁹ *Caabsche Nouvelles van’t Jaar 1781*, Cloete – Swellengrebel (undated and unsigned) in G.J. Schutte, *Briefwisseling van Hendrik Swellengrebel*, p.186.

¹⁷⁰ See G.J. Schutte, *Briefwisseling van Hendrik Swellengrebel*, p.186n; and J. De Villiers, *Hottentot-regimente aan die Kaap*, p.7.

the ambush rather than open warfare. In irregular conflict, and specifically in using tactics such as the ambush, when they knew there was very little danger to themselves, they would be of value, the Frenchman stated.¹⁷¹ In comparison, Cornelis de Jong, who never saw the Corps, as he visited the Cape during the early seventeen nineties, reported that they were apparently good soldiers and good shots.¹⁷²

Local levies and soldiers that supported the VOC fulfilled a dual role of backer and subordinate. Such troops usually acted as reserve troops that could be mobilised in times of war and demobilised thereafter. It was thus a way in which the VOC could quickly enlarge their force and easily cut it back again. Irrespective of how easy it may seem, it took much effort to maintain, arm, train and organise such forces. The VOC always tried to utilize local conditions to their best advantage. This was also the case with the Khoi regiment at the Cape.¹⁷³

5. DEFENCE OF SHIPPING

As many Dutch merchant ships were lost during the Seven Years War, ship safety was very important after the outbreak of the war between France and Britain. VOC establishments had to make sure that ships were properly armed, had sufficient crews and sailed in convoys.¹⁷⁴ After the war with Britain commenced it was obvious that one of the British objectives would be to capture the richly laden VOC return ships. The cargoes of these ships were immensely valuable, worth up to ten times more than the ship itself. By 1781 the VOC had no warships to patrol the coastal waters that could warn the Cape about an approaching enemy. Some ships were despatched to convoy messages or to quickly reconnoitre the bays around the coast, but it was a rare occurrence and the VOC ships that performed such duties were small and so lightly armed that they were insignificant vessels in time of war.

Intelligence was an important aspect that was always a serious consideration, but the record suggests that it was very difficult to keep movement of ships and troops secret for long. By late April 1781 the Council of Policy wanted to urgently communicate the state of affairs at the Cape with *Heeren XVII*, but the only ships leaving for Europe were Swedish and Danish vessels. Van Plettenberg considered it too risky to despatch secret letters with these vessels as there was

¹⁷¹ F. le Valliant, *Reize in de Binnelanden van Afrika*, III, pp.xviii-xxi.

¹⁷² C. de Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen, in de jaren 1791 tot 1797*, Volume I, p.113.

¹⁷³ R. Raben, 'Het Aziatisch Legioen' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.185.

no guarantee that the reports would not fall in enemy hands. In the end, a Dutch merchant in the China trade, Egbert van Karnebeeck, that sailed with a Danish ship (the *Koning van Deenemarken*), acted as courier of secret documents.¹⁷⁵ In one of the letters to the *Heeren XVII*, Van Plettenberg assured them that he will do his utmost to safeguard the four precious China ships at the Cape. In fact detail on what was done to protect the ships were regarded as so sensitive that even the secret letters contained nothing and Van Karnebeeck had to report orally to the *Heeren XVII* on "... de Schickingen genomen om meerm. Vier Chinaase Scheepen en haare Kostbare Ladingen ten besten doenlyk te secureeren".¹⁷⁶

While at the Cape, the French took to doing some of the naval policing tasks. When the Tuscan ship, *Groot Hertog van Toscanen*, under the command of one Captain Andreas de Vaughino arrived at the Cape on 21 March, it was immediately regarded with suspicion by Captain De Coudray of the French naval vessel *l'Elephant*. De Coudray thought the ship might be in British service and stated to Van Plettenberg that it was in the interest of the French and the Dutch if the ship was not allowed to continue her voyage to the East since she would inform the British about the war and the newest developments. Van Plettenberg inspected the documents of the Tuscan ship and did not regard it as fraudulent. De Coudray was convinced that it was and stated as an officer of the French King, he would have to act. He then seized the ship. When the French frigate *Le Pourvoyese* arrived at the Cape from a cruise on 8 April, its Captain, De Maurville, now the senior French officer at the Cape declared that the Tuscan ship was indeed equipped and destined for the British in Bengal and as a result it was a French prize to be taken to Mauritius.¹⁷⁷ The Council of Policy was perturbed, declaring that the ship was under the protection of the Dutch Flag and a Dutch fortress. Independent Fiscal Willem Cornelis Boers had to investigate the matter and stated that the incident was in contravention of international law, and an act of violence against a neutral flag. It also violated the authority of the United Provinces and Boers thought that the French should be prevented from departing with the ship by force. Other officials like Le Sueur and Staring agreed with the principle, but Staring suggested that in the light of the specific conditions they were in, the French should not be prevented from sailing away with the *Groot Hertog van Toscanen*, by force. There was nothing more Van Plettenberg could do. He protested towards the French officers and a formal complaint was also despatched

¹⁷⁴ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1779*, Inkomende Brieven, Raad van Colombo – Council of Policy, 25/1/1779, p.238.

¹⁷⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 20/4/1781, pp.61-2.

¹⁷⁶ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Uitgaande Secreete Brieven, Van Plettenberg – *Heeren XVII*, 20/4/1781, p.307.

¹⁷⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister, 2/4/1781 and 8/4/1781, pp.232 and 234-5.

to De Souillac (the French Governor of Mauritius).¹⁷⁸ On 21 April the French ships sailed, taking the captured Tuscan vessel with them and Van Plettenberg wrote a thorough report on the whole episode to the *Heeren XVII*.¹⁷⁹

Several richly laden VOC East Indiamen were at anchor at the Cape after news of the war arrived. The skippers of these ships as well as the Council of Policy thought it would be unwise to allow them to sail to Europe without any naval escorts as they would have to sail around Britain, and British warships would be out looking for Dutch ships. The fortifications of Table Bay provided good protection, but as the winter was approaching it was considered too dangerous to stay in Table Bay, while in Simon's Bay it was not possible to defend them against an attack by British warships. Van Plettenberg wrote to the Stadtholder that he was unsure what to do with the return fleet of the VOC, but realised that it was better that they did not sail to Europe. Staying at the Cape did not mean that they were free from all dangers, but it involved less risk.¹⁸⁰

Immediately after news of the war arrived in Amsterdam, the Amsterdam *Kamer* of the VOC wrote a letter to the Cape urging them to take all possible measures to secure VOC shipping. They also attached an extract from the minutes of the States-General (dated 26 December 1780) explaining that the State could not take responsibility for ships sailing back to the Netherlands without protection, but it was putting measures in place.¹⁸¹ After the letter arrived (in May with the Danish ship *Ganges*) the Council of Policy again resolved that they would do their best to preserve the VOC ships.

The VOC ships *Honcoop*, *Hoogcarspel*, *Middelburg* and *Paarl* arrived at the Cape on 30 and 31 March 1781. The Council of Policy discussed the various defensive options and also evaluated Hout Bay as a possible haven for VOC ships. It was regarded as less likely for an enemy to visit Saldanha Bay, than Simon's Bay. Another two ships, the outward bound *Held Woltemade* and the return ship the *Dankbaarheid*, arrived during April. The *Held Woltemade* was on its way to Ceylon with much treasure, provisions and military equipment onboard, but had to undergo some repairs and her crew needed to be refreshed before she could proceed. The Council of Policy regarded the safety of the VOC ships and their valuable cargoes (from China and Bengal) as of the utmost importance and it had to be secured in the best possible way ("best

¹⁷⁸ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 20/4/1781, pp.62-5.

¹⁷⁹ NAN VOC4298, Memorie van den gouverneur Plettenberg betreffende het tooscaansch schip de Groot Hertog van Toscane, pp.196-215; and *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister, 21/4/1781, p.238.

¹⁸⁰ NAN 1.01.50 – 1192, Van Plettenberg – Stadhouder, 20/4/1781.

¹⁸¹ See the Extract uijt het Register der Resolutiën van de Hoog Mogende Heeren Staaten Generaal der Vereenigde Neederlanden, 26/12/1780 as well as Bewindhebbers Camer Amsterdam – Van Plettenberg, 25/12/1780, in *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 30/5/1781, pp.86-8.

mogelijkste wijze zouden kunnen waarden gesecureerd"). As a result the most valuable cargo (in the cabins and between decks) and all the extra sails, apart from those on the spars, had to be moved ashore. The space between the decks had to be utilised for guns.¹⁸² The ships then had to proceed to Saldanha Bay and stay there until a strong convoy could be assembled, or until naval vessels were available to escort the ships back to Europe.

The return ships from China and Bengal (*Hoogcarspel*, *Honcoop*, *Middelburg*, *Paarl* and *Dankbaarheijd*) as well as the outgoing *Held Woltemade* (that had to be repaired) departed to Saldanha Bay on Sunday 13 May. The Captain of the *Hoogcarspel*, Gerrit Harmeyer, was appointed as Commodore of the small squadron and had to oversee the defence preparations.¹⁸³ The Council of Policy gave Harmeyer very particular instructions regarding what to do in Saldanha Bay and how to safeguard the fleet. The orders stipulated that he had to create a *Krijgsraad* (Council of War) with all the Captains to discuss the security and safety of the squadron. The ships had to be anchored close to each other in a line-ahead formation to the north of Schaapen Island and the gaps between the ships had to be as small as possible. The between-deck spaces and cabins had to be cleared for guns and all the guns had to be brought to the seaward side (the portside) of the ships to create a strong defensive battery. Furthermore, the ships had to attach additional spars and topmasts together and secure it with light anchors in a semicircle to the seaward side of the ships to defend them against fire-ships and to make it difficult for ships to come alongside and board them.¹⁸⁴

Due to the war the hookers *Zon* and *Snelheid* also had no active service to perform and these lighter ships had to anchor in the shallower water in the southern corner of the bay off Stompe Hoek. All the ships in Harmeyer's squadron had to unbend all their sails and had to stow it onboard one of the hookers. As the hookers were anchored behind the line of ships, it was considered well protected. In case of an enemy attack – "dat Goed verhoede", the minutes of the Council of Policy stated – the hooker on which the sails were stored had to be set alight so that an enemy would not have sails to depart with, if they captured the ships. The masts also had to be nicked ("gekorven" – cut halfway through) so that it would take major repairs to get the ships seaworthy.¹⁸⁵ The Captains were also expressly ordered that, if they had to abandon their ships

¹⁸² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 2/4/1781, pp.45-6.

¹⁸³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister, 13/5/1781, p.243.

¹⁸⁴ CA C2347, Instructiën, Ordere en Instructie voor den Schipper van het ter Rhee de Leggend Retour Schip Hoogcarspel Gerrit Harmeyer..., 8/4/1781, pp.74-8; and *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 2/4/1781, pp.45-6. See also the correspondence and the debate that followed later in *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 5/3/1782, p.97.

¹⁸⁵ CA C2347, Instructiën, Ordere en Instructie voor den Schipper ..., 8/4/1781, pp.74-8; and D. Sleigh, *Die Buiteposte*, p.463.

after a valiant defence (“een manmoedige defensive”), they had to set them alight.¹⁸⁶ For this purpose flammable material that would burn fiercely, had to be placed throughout the ships.

Harmeijer was ordered to remove as many of the 8-pounder guns as necessary from the ships and create two batteries, one at Hoedjespunt (the southern end of the Hoedjesbaaij) and one around Salamanderpunt or Elandspunt (the northern point of the peninsula). A number of conflicting orders regarding the precise gun locations were given, for example the placing of guns “aan d’eene kant van Hoetjensbaai en d’andere aan de buijenste hoek der overwal”.¹⁸⁷ Nonetheless the principle was clear, batteries had to be created with the purpose of preventing an enemy from entering the bay, and each battery had to be under the command of one of the Captains.

On arriving in Saldanha Bay the Captains gave their own interpretation to the orders of the Council of Policy. In their explanations on why they did not execute the orders they received regarding the defensive preparations, they stated that they wanted to land guns on Marcus Island (in the entrance to the bay) to create a battery, but the heavy swell made it impossible. After they investigated creating a small battery at the Hoedjespunt they thought that the distance the guns had to be conveyed from the landing site to the point was too great and when they wanted to land guns at Hoedjespunt, the northerly winds and the heavy seas made it impossible. They then decided that the range of 8-pounders at this location was too limited to prevent ships from entering the bay. Harmeijer and the Captains also reported that the location north of Schaapen Island was too shallow for the big East Indiamen with their deep draught to anchor, and they anchored in the Hoedjesbaaij, northeast of the Hoedjespunt.¹⁸⁸

The Council of Policy and Governor Van Plettenberg (being completely inexperienced in military matters) eventually decided that the ships could be anchored in the Hoedjesbaaij and the Captains had to decide on the best way of anchoring their ships and organise their own defence. They were to keep their whole crews in Saldanha Bay to assist with defending the ships, but emphasis was placed on their initial instruction to store the sails on the hooker *Snelheijd* and on setting her alight in case of an enemy attack.¹⁸⁹

The laxness of the Captains and the inability of the Council of Policy to enforce its decisions are amazing. Since the ships were so valuable to the VOC, they could have despatched a knowledgeable person (Staring, Gordon or Gilquin would have been capable) to Saldanha Bay to investigate the matter and make a qualified decision. As the initial orders

¹⁸⁶ CA C159, Resolutiën, 2/4/1781, pp.216-8.

¹⁸⁷ CA C159, Resolutiën, 2/4/1781, pp.218-9.

¹⁸⁸ CA C159, Resolutiën, 26/5/1781, Harmeijer et al – Van Plettenberg, 23/5/1781, pp.346-51.

regarding the creation of batteries were vague and the Captains complained about the shallow water, they were allowed to make their own arrangements.¹⁹⁰ They moved the ships to the Hoedjiesbaaij, while there was enough sea room and deep enough water for such a small number of ships to anchor in safety to the north of Schaapen Island, as even contemporary maps would indicate. As far as the sails of the ships were concerned they took it from the hooker, sailed to Hoedjesbaaij and did not return it, although ships' boats went to the outpost (close to where the hookers were anchored) on a daily basis to collect provisions. Behind Hoedjespunt, Harmeyjer and his Captains did create a makeshift battery with thirteen light guns, but it was of no real military value.¹⁹¹

The potential of Hout Bay as a possible refuge for ships was investigated on 5 April 1781. Hout Bay had a long clean beach that was ideal for amphibious landings and the valley had ample water and much agricultural produce. The problem was that Hout Bay's anchorage was only big enough for four or five large heavy laden ships to lay protected in the bay while on the positive side; its entrance was easily fortified. As the Council of Policy decided that Hout Bay could also be used, they emphasised that the bay had to be fortified with a large battery of 20 guns (taken from the ships seeking safety in the bay) on the western corner of the entrance to the bay to defend the ships against a possible attack from the sea.¹⁹² The first five return ships that arrived went to Saldanha Bay, while VOC ship *Jagtrust* that was at the Cape, and a further four return ships (the *Amsterdam*, *Batavia*, *Morgenster* and *Indiaan*) which arrived in Simon's Bay between 17 May and 16 June, went to Hout Bay. The Captains of these ships also received clear orders that they had to set their ships alight if in danger of being taken by an enemy. As the anchorage at Hout Bay was protected by land on three sides and ships could anchor quite close to the shore in winter, they only had to protect the entrance of the bay to the south.¹⁹³ Temporary gun emplacements were erected at the western corner of Hout Bay and members of the French Pondicherry Regiment later built a battery armed with the guns landed by the VOC ships.¹⁹⁴

When the VOC ship *Amsterdam* arrived in Simon's Bay on 3 May, she reported that she saw five British ships to the south of Agulhas, probably on their way to False Bay.¹⁹⁵ As it was not feasible to substantially weaken the defence of Table Bay, Simon's Bay was only

¹⁸⁹ CA C159, Resolutiën, 26/5/1781, pp.351-2.

¹⁹⁰ CA C159, Resolutiën, 26/5/1781, pp.346-52.

¹⁹¹ D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, p.464.

¹⁹² CA VC33, Dagverhaal der voornaamste zaaken, 5/4/1781 and 1/5/1781.

¹⁹³ See CA VC33, Dagverhaal der voornaamste zaaken, 17/5/1781, 24/5/1781, 16/6/1781; and CA C1776, Uitgaande Brieven, Van Plettenberg – "Goede vrienden", 23/7/1781 and 26/7/1781, pp.118-21.

¹⁹⁴ D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, p.270.

strengthened with an additional 50 men. No plans were made to capture the British ships. Instead, if they entered False Bay a Sergeant had to go out by boat and give them a letter explaining that as a state of war existed between Britain and the Netherlands, that they had to depart immediately. If they did not, the letter stated, it would be seen as an act of war and if they would try to land with force, they would be repelled by force. The Captain of a Danish ship in Simon's Bay was also ordered not to communicate with the British ships and Independent Fiscal Boers had to go to Simon's Bay to see that the orders were carried out.¹⁹⁶ In the meantime, on 1 May, the hooker *Zon* on her way to False Bay from Table Bay, met with the five British ships at sea about 18 miles to the east of Cape Town. The British ships were running downwind and fired at *Zon*, forcing her to turn-to. They enquired about the war and wished to know if there were any French ships cruising around. They then allowed the *Zon* to proceed.¹⁹⁷ When the VOC ship *Indiaan* arrived in Simon's Bay on 28 May, she reported seeing seven British ships at about 35° south, of which six was thought to be warships.¹⁹⁸ The Cape was effectively "blinded" by the fact that it had no warships to perform patrols or even cruise around to at least give it an early warning capability. If, on the other hand, the Dutch-French alliance only had a few warships at the Cape, they could have interdicted some of the rich British traffic around the coast.

6. CONCLUSION

World events and the wars between the maritime empires of the day had a direct and considerable influence on the Cape. The strategic value of the Cape was a given fact. Wars between the maritime powers of the period were not contained in Europe or the North Atlantic, but the East became an important war arena because the rich trade and the creation of eastern empires. The VOC had to adapt to the changing environment, but the defence of the Cape remained lacking, either due to the inability of the VOC to really grasp the "new" strategic realities, or to a lack of sufficient capital to really affect change; most probably it was a bit of both.

While the Dutch Republic was neutral, the Cape was of much use to the belligerents as a base for their navies and as a convoy assembly point. Their warships and merchantmen were repaired and replenished at the Cape, their sailors and soldiers recuperated in the hospitals, their warships rendezvoused with East Indiamen, while they also patrolled the Cape waters to capture

¹⁹⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister, 3/5/1781, p.241.

¹⁹⁶ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Brandt – eenige Engelse schip, Inkomende Brieven, no date 1781 and Resolutiën, 3/5/1781, pp.76 and 319.

¹⁹⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister, 12/5/1781, p.243.

¹⁹⁸ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister, 28/5/1781, p.246.

or intimidate their opponents. Without any Dutch naval protection, the Cape was subject to the whims of the great fleets visiting and it basically had no ability to exercise its power along its coast. In fact, the Cape had no real authority outside the range of the guns of its coastal fortifications – and this only applied to Table Bay at the time.

When the Dutch Republic blundered into a war with Britain, they were militarily and economically utterly unprepared and the State did not have the ability to provide the required protection to its overseas possessions, shipping and trade. Besides the economic difficulties of the VOC and the poor defence of its establishments, the Cape also had its own unique problems. It had an unpopular and inexperienced Governor with a limited understanding of defence matters, the interior was in turmoil and much dissidence existed with VOC control. When Gordon took command of the Garrison it was not only small, but had disciplinary problems and was militarily unprepared. Though the Garrison was bolstered by recalling soldiers that worked as *pasgangers* and artisans and appointing new officers, these were militarily not the best options, but had immediate effect. The militia did provide an important base of part-time soldiers to rely on in an emergency, but it had shortcomings as militiamen could not be called-up for long periods due to personal commitments and problems in the interior. As no immediate reinforcements were forthcoming to increase the weak Garrison, the only way to increase the standing military contingent, in the typical VOC mould, was to raise local troops. A military unit, consisting of members of the local Khoi population and persons of mixed blood, was created with the local population responding well to the call for support.

The fixed defences of the Cape were in a poor condition. Though a number of fortifications existed, due to a lack of funds many of them were not permanent, were outdated or required urgent renewal and maintenance. Gilquin's shock in surveying the fortifications is clearly evident from his secret reports and he warned the Governor that it would not be possible to defend the Cape without proper fortifications. In terms of weapons and ammunition, things were none the better. Heavier guns were urgently required, while many of the existing guns were rusted or unserviceable. Also, the muskets were in a poor condition and the Cape lacked sufficient quantities of gunpowder, ammunition, cannonballs and musket balls.

With no warships or cruisers at the Cape after the war commenced, they had limited means of maritime communication. Two small vessels (*Postiljon* and *Herstelder*) were despatched and did excellent service, but the ideal was to utilise a naval frigate in such a capacity, as the French indeed did. In addition, the Cape had no "over the horizon" capability and they had to await friend or foe appearing over the horizon (which made a surprise attack so much more possible), while they also could not interdict rich British East Indiamen rounding the Cape.

The defence of the valuable and vital VOC return ships was important to the waning VOC and required special attention. Appropriate defence of shipping also implied proper defence against maritime power projection, as the two issues were utterly interrelated. From the VOC point of view both its possession and its shipping had to be defended against the British and this is exactly the role secure bases performed. With its system of fortifications Table Bay provided protection, but its anchorage was not safe during the winter months, which implied that the all-important return ships had to hide in unprotected bays. Without properly protected ports, shipping was all the more vulnerable, while well-defended ports protected shipping and provided defence against an enemy attack.

After the American War of Independence commenced, the belligerents focussed on the strategic value the Cape had to their war efforts in the East. As a result of British-Dutch tension, the Netherlands was soon involved in the war, yet the Cape was not at all ready for war and it was unprepared for the role it had to play in the coming war. With the imminent danger of a British attack the defenders prepared the defences, not knowing who will be at the Cape first – French reinforcement or a British task force. As the discussion in the next chapter indicates, luck was on their side: they had a capable ally in France.

*Chapter 4***WAR AT SEA AND THE MARITIME DEFENCE OF THE CAPE, 1781 - 1783****1. INTRODUCTION**

A Dutch historian wrote in 1790 that one of the crucial shortcomings in the proper defence of the Cape during the war, was the absence of a strong Dutch naval squadron; "... verlangden sterk na Vaderlandsche Schepen, in geduurige vrees voor de overmagt eener Vyandylyke Vloot".¹ Without a naval presence the first warning of an impending danger would be when an enemy appeared offshore. However, in the absence of the Dutch Navy, the French filled in.

It is generally accepted that the Fourth-Anglo Dutch War was a trade war, but what does it imply? The maritime dimension of the war was its most prominent. The objectives of the war were the destruction of enemy commerce while expanding own commerce both by conquering possessions and by capturing merchant ships. The most important tool of the belligerents was sea power, which enabled them to project their power across the oceans, defend against an enemy or prevent an enemy's access to trade and sea routes.

Though sea power has often determined the outcome of wars, military historians, specifically from a popular history point of view, can overemphasise the impact or value of naval conflicts. Nevertheless, naval forces were often decisive in defence. For example in 1588, when England was under the threat of a Spanish invasion, it was the rising English Navy that negated the threat. Two hundred years later, General Cornwallis surrendered to General Washington at Yorktown (1781) because a French fleet prevented the British from being re-supplied by sea. Despite British military successes ashore, the Americans gained their independence as a result of the temporary sea control of their French ally. In the same year, the French Navy secured the Cape against a British invasion force. Sea power therefore became a crucial determinant in this war.

Navies were flexible and powerful policy instruments and could be deployed over huge distances, while its utilisation often posed strategic as well as command and communication

¹ J. Wagenaar, *Vaderlandsche Historie*, III, VI, 27, p.281.

problems. This is why good commanders were important, as situations varied and changed, they often made important strategic decisions without being able to consult with their superiors.

The war was fought in different theatres: in North America and the Caribbean, around Europe and in the Mediterranean, and in the Indian Ocean. The clash at the Porto Praya (Cape Verde Islands) between a British and a French squadron was technically in the Atlantic, yet strategically it formed part of the war in the Indian Ocean because it concerned the security of the Cape, which was seen as a gateway to the East and supported operations in the East.

The defence of the Cape during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War was a complex international affair as it entailed the local preparations for war and cooperation with France. In the end it was not the landward defences that were crucial, but naval forces. The Cape was the focus of two important exercises in maritime power projection: the one aimed at capturing it was foiled by another, aimed at defending it. During the war French naval vessels were regular visitors to the Cape and made the establishment of Dutch-French authority in the surrounding seas possible.

In the greater French-British clash the strategic location of the Cape was important to the belligerents and it became crucial to the French campaign in the East because it was both a base and a magazine. This however implied that the maritime security of the Cape had to be maintained, which was sometimes without a permanent naval presence. The French proved to be loyal allies and much of the VOC empire might have been lost, was it not for French military support.

This chapter is concerned with the maritime dimension of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, more specifically those aspects relevant to the Cape. As naval forces were employed by states to achieve specific objectives, the political background will be discussed with reference to British and French objectives as well as the outcome of the chance meeting between the British and French expeditionary forces. Navies and maritime communication were important for the defence of the Cape and brief attention will be paid to it as well as to important maritime events in other theatres of the war.

2 THE BRITISH STRATEGY

2.1. The British Objectives

Britain was in a difficult position by 1780. During the Seven Years War it relied on colonial support to fight the French in North America, while it now fought hostile colonists in a land war, with French support. Land forces were raised and German battalions hired, which resulted in

naval spending being somewhat minimised. The war had now shifted from a naval war in which the British Royal Navy supported its forces of occupation and conquest ashore, to a full maritime war, pitting the resources of the European maritime powers against each other. In Europe, Gibraltar was under siege from Spain and even the well proven British tool, the naval blockade, was not always successful because it was difficult to maintain due to the long combined coastlines of Britain's enemies.² In addition, the threat of a French-Spanish invasion of Britain did exist. British forces were having difficulties in North America, while at sea the French Navy seemed to be getting it right in that arena. In India, Britain had substantial forces and the situation was stable up to 1780, when Haider Ali (Muslim Ruler of Mysore) tackled the British and achieved some military successes. With the Dutch in the war, the situation in India and the French threat became much more substantial, due to the value of the Cape as a base.³

Though the British Royal Navy experienced some problems, Britain was still a foremost power with competent experienced officers and depth in her naval administration. She now faced major opposition and in naval terms, her enemies (France and Spain) were strong in Europe, North America and the Caribbean. Though her newest enemy, the Dutch had 76 warships, more than twenty were not serviceable due to their age. So, in terms of naval strength, Britain had about 103 ships of the line operational, while France and Spain had 126, to which number the Dutch added another seventeen (out of a total of 25) operational ships of the line. In terms of cruiser strength, Britain had 111 in service, while her opponents had about 132 (France 58, Spain 34 and the Dutch 40).⁴ This was not to be taken as the complete picture, as it is difficult to accurately judge the discrepancies between naval strengths on paper and actual combat readiness. Many ships might be unserviceable, while some of the commissioned ships were often not operational due to limitations posed by manpower, equipment and logistics. The Allied advantage was slight, if it really existed, since they had problems with the basic infrastructure for sustained combined operations, they lacked seamen, victuals as well as the naval stores necessary to secure sustained operations over a period of time. The Dutch Admiralties for example, had a general shortage of crews, stores and cash. Though the British weakness in the North Sea might have offered the Dutch much opportunity to attack, they had to

² R. Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare*, pp.241-55.

³ See the discussions in H.W. Richmond, *Statesmen and Sea Power*, p.155; and H.W. Richmond, *The Navy in India 1763-1783*, pp.121-6.

⁴ Much discrepancy exists in terms of naval strengths at the time. These statistics were compiled from IMH *Rapporten van de respectie Collegien ter Admiraliteiten, 1781*, pp.5-111; G.R. Barnes and J.H. Owen (ed), *The Private Papers of John, Earl of Sandwich*, IV, p.18; R. Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare*, pp.244 and 254; and A.R. Kravenhoff van de Leur, *Militair-*

consolidate their naval power first, in order to convoy their own trade in the North Atlantic.⁵ Nevertheless, both the Dutch and the British were engaged in serious naval building programmes and in naval terms things would soon again look up for Britain.

The trade with the East now became more important and essential to British national interest. But it was vulnerable in three areas, the English Channel, the seas around India and thirdly around the Cape and St Helena Island (the rendezvous point for homeward-bound convoys and escorts). Sea power cannot exist without bases and the British base on this route was St Helena Island. From the British point of view St Helena was threatened (the French considered taking it during the Seven Years War) while it was not self-sufficient and depended on the Cape for supplies. The French base in the Indian Ocean was Mauritius. France knew their power in the Indian Ocean pivoted on this island, and they made it impregnable. Important though, as Richmond stated, a base that cannot “supply a fighting force ceases to have any significance, for it cannot fulfil its purposes; and although it may occupy a position which is often compared to a ‘Key’ ... in reality, [it is] no more important than is a sentry box without a sentry”.⁶ Mauritius could not support its own population and was dependant on supplies from the Cape. In fact, as the British admirals knew, a constant service was maintained, often escorted by warships. The “Mauritius sentry” could only remain in the box, as long as he received his daily provisions from the Cape! So, as a base must have both food and the materials of war to be “outstandingly important” the Cape was better suited and located for the role than Mauritius and St Helena.

From the British point of view the Cape could act as a magazine or a military outpost for the East, with its healthy climate it could be a training base for troops and it could serve as a naval base. Also, if the Cape could be wrenched from Dutch hands, it would be difficult for France to maintain its Indian Ocean islands because they were provisioned from the Cape. As Wagenaar wrote (in 1790), taking the Cape would make Britain master of the East; meaning prosperity and wealth to Britain. If the Cape were in the hands of Britain’s enemies and a strong squadron were stationed there, it would seriously hamper British maritime communications and do much damage to her trade. He likened the Cape to a tollgate where all ships must pass. With an alert force at the Cape, it would be difficult for shipping to go by undetected at a regular

historische schetsen: over de noodzakelijkheid van de kennis der krijgsgeschiedenis. Land- en zeemacht in de 18e eeuw, pp.40, 42 and 102.

⁵ G.R. Barnes and J.H. Owen (ed), *The Private Papers of John, Earl of Sandwich*, IV, p.18; and R. Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare*, pp.244-50.

⁶ H.W. Richmond, *The Navy in India 1763-1783*, pp.121-3.

basis. If Britain on the other hand had the Cape, her enemies would be dealt a severe blow – taking from them the “key” to India.⁷

The British wished to deprive the French islands of their food supply (the Cape) and Admiral Hughes (C-in-C East Indies) proposed to the Secretary of State on 14 August 1779, that a British squadron could be placed in False Bay to intercept supply ships between Mauritius and the Cape.⁸ Since he had just enjoyed the hospitality of the Cape, Hughes also provided the British authorities with a detailed description of the Cape of Good Hope and its defences, and indicated what type of force would be necessary to capture it. Capturing the Cape, would not only reduce the French ability to maintain forces in the Indian Ocean, but also facilitate a greater concentration of British power in the East.

In the meantime the EEIC placed much emphasis on the value of the Cape and received support from the Prime Minister, (Frederick North Second Earl of Guilford, known as Lord North) and his Government. The Directors of the EEIC wrote to Lord Hillsborough (Secretary of State) on 25 October 1780 that it was “self-evident and unquestionable” that the Cape was the “Key to and from the East Indies ... indeed we must consider the Cape of Good Hope as the Gibraltar of India”. In the light of the strained relations with the Dutch, possession of the Cape was rendered a critical issue.⁹ When war with the Netherlands became imminent, North immediately informed the EEIC who suggested that an expedition, to take possession of the Cape, should be dispatched as soon as war broke out.¹⁰

The British were well aware of the dreadful defensive condition of the United Provinces. On 3 November 1780 the British Ambassador at The Hague (Sir Joseph York) informed the Foreign Secretary (Lord Stormont) that the Netherlands was “deprived of artillery and of stores of all kinds, having neither fleet, nor army, nor is any of her possessions outside Europe in a state of defence”. On 7 December York added that all the VOC establishments in the East Indies “are actually in a deplorable condition”.¹¹

A balance existed between Britain and France in the Indian Ocean by 1780 as both naval commanders (Sir Edward Hughes and the Comte d’Orves) had about six ships of the line. This changed with the declaration of war, as the French now had more strategic scope and access to

⁷ J. Wagenaar, *Vaderlandsche Historie*, III, VI, 27, pp.275-7.

⁸ L.C.F. Turner, *The Cape of Good Hope and the Trafalgar Campaign*, p.91.

⁹ L.C.F. Turner, *The Cape of Good Hope and the Trafalgar Campaign*, Directors of the EEIC – Hillsborough, 25/10/1781, p.94.

¹⁰ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, p.151.

¹¹ See the correspondence between Sir Joseph York and Lord Stormont in L.C.F. Turner, *The Cape of Good Hope and the Trafalgar Campaign*, p.93.

facilities – both the Cape and Trincomalee (on Ceylon close to the Coromandel Coast of India).¹² To the British the Cape was now an enemy base and though they were not apprehensive about the Dutch, they feared the French would properly utilise the Cape. It was quick and easy to mount an expedition from the Cape to St Helena (downwind from the Cape) and with the Cape in enemy hands, a large garrison had to be maintained at St Helena, which the island was unable to support, given that it also had to supply homeward bound ships.¹³ Under these circumstances, British strategy logically aimed at eliminating this threat.

2.2. The British Task Force

During a meeting in Lord Stormont's office on 29 December 1780, the directors of the EEIC implored "His Majesty ... [to] attack ... the Cape of Good Hope".¹⁴ Lord Hillsborough added that it would require 3000 troops under a very strong naval escort.¹⁵ The British Cabinet approved the expedition and preparations commenced after the first dispatches about it went out on 2 January 1781.¹⁶ One of the first steps the British Government therefore took after war was declared, was to prepare an expedition to take the Cape.

The First Lord of the Admiralty Board at the time was John Montague Fourth Earl Sandwich, but under him the administration of Royal Navy was not as it used to be. Letters written to Sandwich early in 1781 indicate that problems were experienced with equipping an expeditionary force in Plymouth and Portsmouth, as they lacked men and material and had no clear instructions.¹⁷ The Sandwich legacy is controversial and opinion varies. As was said of Sandwich, he was "a fearless bully in debate" but not the man to have control of the Royal Navy at such a time.¹⁸ Much of the shame for the disasters suffered during the American War of Independence is placed on him; he is described as a hedonistic aristocrat constantly gaming and misusing the Navy coffers as if they were his own; and as an apathetic lordship thinking out grandiose names and colour schemes for ships while they decayed from neglect. Others saw

¹² R. Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare*, pp.248-9.

¹³ H.W. Richmond, *The Navy in India 1763-1783*, pp.125-6.

¹⁴ Minute of Cabinet at Lord Stormont's Office, 29/12/1780, from the Papers of King George III, quoted in L.C.F. Turner, *The Cape of Good Hope and the Trafalgar Campaign*, p.95.

¹⁵ Richmond refers to dispatches and memoranda, also by Lord Sandwich; however none of these were to be found in the British National Archive or in the various Sandwich Papers collections.

See H.W. Richmond, *The Navy in India 1763-1783*, pp.119-21.

¹⁶ H.W. Richmond, *The Navy in India 1763-1783*, pp.126 and 128.

¹⁷ National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, hereafter NMM, SAN/F/26/48, Darby – Sandwich 4/2/1781; and SANF26/52, Pay – Sandwich, 4/2/1781.

¹⁸ L.C.F. Turner, *The Cape of Good Hope and the Trafalgar Campaign*, p.98.

him as a capable administrator, a visionary that supported the voyages of James Cook that laboured long hours at his desk in an effort to place the naval shore establishments and naval administration on a more secure footing.¹⁹ Yet, the naval effort during the war was “mismanaged and half-heartedly undertaken”, Sandwich was not “in touch with the realities of the naval situation”, there was much discontent in the fleet as the Admirals were at loggerheads with Sandwich and many refused to accept appointments. Nevertheless, not the opposition from the Admirals or the declining Navy induced Sandwich to resign – only when Lord North’s inept Government fell in 1782, did he leave office. In the Navy, Sandwich was known by the nickname Jemmy Twitcher, a character in the *Beggar’s Opera* that sold his friend!²⁰

The Army Commander for the Cape expedition was Major-General Sir William Medows KB, who had distinguished himself in operations at St Lucia.²¹ If the expedition failed to capture the Cape, Medows was ordered to reinforce India with 2000 men.²² The naval contingent was under the command of a Post Captain acting as Commodore, George Johnstone. It is an interesting choice, the sources provide no clear reason for the appointment and the documents explaining it had vanished. Though many letters, mostly on trivial matters, Johnstone wrote to Sandwich over a period had survived and one might assume that the appointment was influenced by Sandwich. Rodger (Sandwich’s biographer), however, suggested that Sandwich and Johnstone were opponents, and that the latter’s appointment was influenced by Lord North (the Prime Minister).²³ The French thought Admiral Palliser would command the expedition, while Admiral Darby, who is not mentioned as commander, was responsible for preparing the force and often complained to Sandwich about the poor planning. Sandwich apparently considered Sir Robert Harland as commander, but could not affect the appointment.²⁴

Johnstone was centre stage for only a brief period, but his actions, or inaction, had a significant effect on the Cape. Perhaps this warrants a brief introduction. George Johnstone (1730-1787) was the well connected son of a Baronet. He gained an unenviable reputation early in his career: after he was posted to the *Sutherland* in 1755 it was said that he killed the

¹⁹ N.A.M. Rodgers, *The Admiralty*, pp.73-5. For a comprehensive discussion, very supportive of the vast and positive contribution Sandwich made to the administration of the Royal Navy, see N.A.M. Rodgers, *The Insatiable Earl. A Life of John Montagu, Fourth Earl of Sandwich 1718-1792*.

²⁰ L. Gardiner, *The British Admiralty*, pp.161, 171-6; N.A.M. Rodgers, *The Insatiable Earl*, pp.256-7; and R. Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare*, p.236.

²¹ NAUK WO164/22. Pay List No 1 for the *Hoogskarpel* and *Paerl* Dutch East India ships captured in Saldanha Bay 21/7/1781.

²² H.W. Richmond, *The Navy in India 1763-1783*, p.128.

²³ N.A.M. Rodgers, *The Insatiable Earl*, p.283.

²⁴ NMM, SAN/F/26/48, Darby – Sandwich 4/2/1781; SANF26/52, Pay – Sandwich, 4/2/1781; and N.A.M. Rodgers, *The Insatiable Earl*, p.283.

captain's clerk. He was later court-martialled on other charges and found guilty of insubordination and disobedience, but was only reprimanded. As his behaviour was at best erratic and often vindictive, he was generally disliked in the Royal Navy. In November 1763 he became Governor of Pensacola (West Florida) and was involved in a number of disagreements with colleagues. He became a Member of Parliament (for Cockermouth) in 1768 and was notorious for "his shameless and scurrilous utterances, while his total want of fear and his adroitness with the pistol rendered him a useful addition to his party".²⁵ Johnstone was one of three commissioners Lord North appointed to promote reconciliation with the American colonies, but due to his unacceptable behaviour (not qualified), Congress declared that "it was incompatible with their honour to hold any manner of correspondence or intercourse with him"²⁶ and he had to return to Britain. Yet, as a result of political favour, Johnstone was promoted to post-rank. After he vehemently attacked Lord Howe's operations in 1779, some politicians (but apparently not seamen) appreciated his grasp of naval matters. Sandwich appointed him as Commodore of the Lisbon squadron,²⁷ under Admiral Darby, followed by his appointment to command the Cape expedition.

No instructions or orders issued to Johnstone or any motivation that explains the objectives of the expedition is to be found in the archives of the Admiralty, or in the Sandwich Papers (a comprehensive collection of his documents). It is as if the Johnstone expedition was "wished away" afterwards, and the relevant papers purged by a powerful person aware of his image in history and his reputation. When Johnstone returned to Britain, much explaining was done, the events were discussed in numerous letters to the Admiralty, court cases followed and various pamphlets were written and distributed. However, the original planners were not mentioned and the original orders are not to be found. Johnstone only mentioned in a letter dated 5 June 1782, that he received secret orders from Lord Sandwich, as early as 6 December 1780,²⁸ well before the important 29 December meeting in Lord Stormont's office!

In the history of overseas expeditions and great military operations, a lack of secrecy has often contributed to failure. Due to a leakage in the office of the Secretary of State and a spy called De la Motte, detail of the Johnstone expedition soon reached Paris and Amsterdam. De la Motte was apprehended on 5 January 1781 when he dropped a bunch of papers on the stairs to the Secretary's office that contained details of ships, crews, sailing times and activities at the shipyards. A subsequent investigation showed that De la Motte reported detail of the Johnstone

²⁵ S. Lee, (ed), *Dictionary of National Biography*, Volume XXX, pp.75-6.

²⁶ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of sea power upon history*, p.421.

²⁷ H.W. Richmond, *The Navy in India 1763-1783*, p.128.

expedition to the French. He was found guilty of high treason on 14 July 1781 and was dismembered and executed in the most horrific way.²⁹

As most historians relate the story; when the France gained intelligence of the Johnstone expedition they immediately sent a force under Admiral De Suffren to prevent the Cape from falling into British hands. This is not entirely true. News of the Johnstone expedition did not trigger the French to dispatch De Suffren, but it most probably accelerated his departure. The French contemplated such an expedition for a while as the rising tension between the Netherlands and Britain increased the chances of a British attack on Dutch possessions. As India was very important to Britain and their relations with Haider Ali and the Marathas were degenerating, the French wished to open a campaign against the British in India and affect a severe blow to Britain. But nothing would be possible without Mauritius and as Mauritius depended on the Cape, the Cape had to be captured from the British point of view.

To attack or invade a position such as the Cape, enough ocean going vessels (both warships and transports) with adequate endurance was a vital prerequisite. The longer the voyage, the more vessel space was needed and both the soldiers and naval vessels required supplies to sustain or support operations ashore.³⁰ Amphibious operations depended on the concentration of shipping and the protection warships provided. Sufficient warships provided both safety at sea and assistance ashore. The British understood this well and prepared a substantial force to attack the Cape.

While the ships were at anchor at the Downs to embark the troops, Johnstone constantly complained to Sandwich. Nothing was to his liking and others were always to blame. The embarkation of troops took too long and transport ships were anchored incorrectly, which caused damage when ships drifted against each other in a gale. Captain Boyle of the *San Carlos* was the culprit, as he was "unfit for such a situation".³¹ Johnstone later claimed (in 1784) that the gales damaged a number of the transport vessels and delayed his departure as they had to re-divide troops amongst the other ships.³² Johnstone was very critical of many his

²⁸ NAUK ADM1/54, Commodore George Johnstone, 1781-1784, Johnstone – Stephans, 5/6/1782.
²⁹ *The Annual Register, or a View of the History, Politics, and Literature for the Year 1781*, pp.162 and 184-5, quoted in http://dickens.stanford.edu/tale/issue3_gloss3.html (accessed in June 2004). In *A Tale of Two Cities*, by Charles Dickens, the trail of Darnay coincides with the American War of Independence and corresponds much with the De la Motte case, the difference is that Darnay was trialled in 1780 and that he was ultimately acquitted.

³⁰ H.W. Richmond, *Imperial Defence and Capture at Sea in War*, pp.141-3.

³¹ NAUK ADM1/54, Commodore George Johnstone, 1781-1784, See Johnstone – Sandwich correspondence, 17/2/1781, 19/2/1781 and 23/2/1781.

³² NAUK ADM1/54, Commodore George Johnstone, 1781-1784, See correspondence between Johnstone and the Admiralty during 1782 and 1783.

Captains; specifically those on the transport vessels. Boyle of the *San Carlos*, his first target, was relieved of his command in Porto Praya due to “ill health” and Johnstone made a few new appointments.³³

Johnstone also had one Lieutenant William Paterson onboard as an adviser. Paterson was a travel companion of Gordon and had travelled the Cape extensively between 1777 and 1779. When he sailed back to Europe on the *Held Woltemade* in 1780, Van Prehn was one of his fellow passengers. Paterson was therefore potentially very valuable as a guide³⁴ and when it later became known that Paterson was in Johnstone’s fleet, many of his Cape acquaintances were perturbed about the way in which he paid back their hospitality and put to dishonourable use the information he gained during his visit. Though widely believed at the Cape that he was sent out as a spy in 1777, this seems highly unlikely.³⁵

Most sources put the size of the British military contingent on about 3000 men. Yet, it was probably closer to 2500 men as a headcount of the names on the prize money lists the Army compiled afterwards of those that participated in the expedition, totals 2571. Obviously there is no proof that these lists were complete, but they include members of the Royal Artillery, two engineering officers, other officers and about 2300 infantrymen. The infantry consisted of two companies each of the 8th, 9th, 20th and 47th Regiments, as well as the 2nd Battalions of 42nd, 98th, and 100th Regiments.³⁶

Due to the gale of 27 February the British expeditionary force only moved from Spithead on 13 March. Johnstone hoisted his Commodore’s Broad Pennant onboard the *HMS Romney* “which was cheer’d by the Squadron and Convoy”.³⁷ They anchored in the roadstead and sailed on 14 March. According to some of the logbooks and journals the fleet consisted of 47 sail, while others sources put it between 49 and 44 including the armed transports, store ships and Indiamen.³⁸ According to a letter Johnstone wrote to Lord Hillsborough on 30 April 1781 (published in the London Gazette of 8 June 1781), his squadron consisted of the following naval vessels: *HMS Romney* (50), *HMS Hero* (74), *HMS Monmouth* (64), *HMS Jupiter* (50), *HMS Isis* (50), *HMS Active* (32), *HMS Diana* (36), *HMS Manilla* (20), *HMS Oporto* (16), the bomb vessel

³³ NAUK ADM1/54, Commodore George Johnstone, 1781-1784, See Johnstone – Sandwich correspondence, 10/4/1781 and 16/4/1781.

³⁴ J. Suasso de Lima, *Geschiedenis van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, p.17.

³⁵ V.S. Forbes and J. Rourke (ed), *Paterson’s Cape Travels 1777 to 1779*, p.23.

³⁶ NAUK WO164/480, Saldanha Prize Lists 1781.

³⁷ NAUK ADM51/4313, Captain’s log, *HMS Romney*, 13/3/1781.

³⁸ NAUK ADM52/2506, J. Duane, Master, A Journal of the proceedings of *HMS Romney*, Commodore George Johnstone, commencing 24 /7/1780 to 24/6/1781, see 14/3/1781; and ADM52/2506, Logbook of the *HMS Romney*, for the period 24/7/1780 to 23/7/1781, see 14/3/1781.

HMS Terror (10), the fire-ship *HMS Infernal* (10) and a cutter *HMS Rattlesnake*. Then they also had armed transports, East Indiamen and victuallers, which including the *Jason* (32), *San Carlos* (28), *Royal Charlotte* (24), *Porpoise* (24), *Pondicherry* (24), *Resolution* (20), *Lord Townshend* (20), thirteen East Indiamen armed with 26 guns each and twelve transports armed at least with six guns each.³⁹ Therefore 44 in total – the discrepancy might be due to the vessels that stayed behind because of storm damage.

Nearly three years before the Johnstone expedition departed, the renowned Admiral Augustus Keppel warned Sandwich that a squadron of only four or five big warships were either too few or too many. In Keppel's opinion such a force was in danger of being "demolished in detail. If the enemy send a very large squadron, you must have one ready to follow them ... Four or five ships will be unequal to face bold and large undertakings of the enemy ...".⁴⁰ Keppel's argument is typical of British naval thinking, to act with impunity against an enemy and have superior force in the theatre of operations. This was not the Johnstone scenario.

3. FRENCH SUPPORT TO THE DUTCH WAR EFFORT

3.1. Dutch-French Diplomacy

After Britain declared war much concern existed about the safety of the scattered Dutch overseas possession, since the Dutch Government knew that without enough warships it was not possible to properly defend them against a much stronger British Royal Navy. As a result, one of the first things they did was to call on their new ally, France. But as the Duke De la Vauguyon, French Ambassador to The Hague, dryly commented to the Dutch on 19 January 1781, he already pointed out the danger to the VOC before the outbreak of the war and had offered French assistance. It occurred less than a month before the outbreak of war: on 30 November 1780 De la Vauguyon warned the Dutch that the Cape was badly defended and they had to act urgently, "seeing the state in which it is I wouldn't be surprised if the English tried to take it over. They claim that with two ships of the line and 5000 to 6000 troops, they would easily gain control. I beg you, Sir, to bring this observation, with your usual discretion, to the attention of the right people who are able to respond to it in the correct manner". Two weeks later (on 14 December) the Dutch simply answered that according to information they had received, they "do

³⁹ Anonymous Pamphlet, *Blake's Remarks on Com. Johnstone's account of his engagement with a French Squadron under the command of Mons De Suffrein, on April 16. 1781 in Port Praya Road in the Island of St Jago*, pp.9-10.

not have a single worry with respect to resenting the Court of London ... express letters ... by English traders to traders in Amsterdam, completely reassure the latter about the dispositions of the British Cabinet".⁴¹ Surely they must have been quite surprised when Britain declared war a few days later!

Things were now different; the two countries could openly assist each other. The Dutch urgently required French support to defend the Cape, while it was important to the French to be able to use the Cape as a base and secure its supplies in the war against Britain in the Indian Ocean. Dutch and French diplomatic representatives immediately engaged in deliberations about the safety of the Cape and other Dutch possessions. The Committee for Secret Affairs, emphasised the dangerous condition ("gevaarlijke toestand") in which the VOC establishments were at this stage and specifically the Cape of Good Hope was in immediate danger and urgently required warships to assist with its defence and troops to reinforce the small military establishment.⁴² French officials, on the other hand, used words almost identical to those of their British counterparts when discussing the strategic value of the Cape. Late in 1780 De Lozier (a former governor of Mauritius) warned the Marquis De Castries (French Minister of Marine) that the Cape was "le magazine de nos îles"⁴³ and that it would be difficult to maintain their Indian Ocean islands without the Cape. As De la Vauguyon's letter of November indicated, the idea to reinforcement the French forces in the Indian Ocean and concern about the safety of the Cape, already received much attention in France before the outbreak of the Anglo-Dutch War.

De la Vauguyon reported to the French Court that the Dutch were very worried about the safety of the Cape, and specifically about the safety of the valuable return ships, which most probably have already departed from the Indies.⁴⁴ The French Court treated the Dutch appeals for assistance very sympathetically⁴⁵ and early in February 1781, De La Vauguyon notified the VOC that the squadron France was preparing for the Indian Ocean was available to assist with the defence of the Cape for a while. In a letter to Van Pletterberg, dated 17 February 1781, the Committee for Secret Affairs stated that as much as possible was done to safeguard the Cape because it was a very important establishment and that a French squadron would bolster the

⁴⁰ *Private Papers of John, Earl of Sandwich*, II, Keppel – Sandwich, 16/4/1778, p.30.

⁴¹ See the correspondence between Vergenes and De la Vauguyon, 30/11/1780 and 14/12/1780 in L.C.F. Turner, *The Cape of Good Hope and the Trafalgar Campaign*, pp.93-4.

⁴² NAN VOC4536, Rapport van de bewindhebber J. Graafland, aan de *Heeren XVII* betreffende de verrichtingen van de secrete committee, 9/7/1781.

⁴³ L.C.F. Turner, *The Cape of Good Hope and the Trafalgar Campaign*, p.91. See also H.W. Richmond, *The Navy in India 1763-1783*, p.131.

⁴⁴ G.D. Scholtz, *Suid-Afrika en die Wêreldpolitiek*, p.59.

defence of the Cape both at sea and on land, “ ... binnen weinige dagen een Eskader van scheepen zou vertrekken ... zich eenigen tijd aan uw Gouvernement te doen ophouden om aldaar te wezen tot dekking en defensie van de Kaab tegen vijandelijke aanvallen”.⁴⁶

This was good news, but as the Indian Ocean was the objective of the squadron, what would happen after the “eenigen tijd” came to an end and the squadron departed? Who would then defend the Cape? And, what is to be done about the defence of the other VOC possessions? This is exactly why the Stadtholder sent two representatives, P.E. van der Perre and F.W. Boers (directors of the VOC), to France in February. They had to elicit French military support for the Cape and the VOC. Their appeals to the French Court were successful and they soon secured the service of a French military contingent at the Cape for the duration of the war.⁴⁷ Van Plettenberg was ordered to receive the French squadron, allow the French troops to land and conduct operations for the defence of the Cape. They had to be provided with all the necessary support: “... de ontscheeping der Troepen toe te laten, ten einde dezelve hunne operation aan Land ter bescherming van de Kaap zoude kunnen verrigten ... ook aan dat Eskader van Uwen kant alle de gerievelijkheeden moeten worden beweesen...”⁴⁸

On French advice Van der Perre and Boers concluded an agreement for the service of the Luxembourg Regiment on 7 April 1781, while an agreement with the Legion of Waldener soon followed. The Committee for Secret Affairs explained to Van Plettenberg that they did what they could for the defence of such an important establishment as the Cape (“beveiliging van een zo important etablissement als is de Kaap”) and that extra troops would be provided. Van Plettenberg was reminded that despite the presence of so many foreign troops, the VOC was still the master of the Castle and he had to maintain control over the most important military positions, weapons and magazines.⁴⁹

More troops were necessary, but the Dutch representatives preferred to have Swiss rather than French troops, to defend their dependent territories. The bodyguard of the French Kings were Swiss mercenaries and they were reputed to be brave, hardy and professional soldiers. With the consent of the French King, the Duke De Choiseul introduced the Dutch representatives to a Swiss officer in Royal service, Charles-Daniel De Meuron. In May 1781

⁴⁵ NAN VOC4536, Rapport van de bewindhebber J. Graafland, 9/7/1781.

⁴⁶ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Inkomende Secreete Brieven, Gecommitteerde Bewindhebberen – Van Plettenberg, 17/2/1781, p.216-7.

⁴⁷ Wagenaar, J., *Vaderlandsche Historie*, III, VI, 27, p.273.

⁴⁸ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Inkomende Secreete Brieven, Van de Perre and Boers – Van Plettenberg, 11/3/1781, p.217.

⁴⁹ NAN VOC4537, Geheime Commissie – Van Plettenberg, 4/5/1781.

they concluded an agreement with De Meuron for a Swiss regiment.⁵⁰ (Details concerning the foreign regiments at the Cape will be discussed in the next chapter.)

By June the French notified the VOC that more French reinforcements would be despatched to the East and that these forces would replenish at the Cape. In addition the Governor of Mauritius was ordered to despatch warships to the Cape from time to time to assist with its defence.⁵¹ Unquestionably, much to the relief of the Dutch, the framework for crucial French military support to the vulnerable VOC possessions was now in place.

3.2. The French Task Force

Already on 28 October 1780 when French officials were discussing the safety of the Cape and the French islands in the Indian Ocean, the Marquis De Castries asked the Navy if four coppered ships of the line, and officers that know the East, were available for service in the East.⁵² No definite orders were however issued. On 27 December 1780 news reached Paris that Britain was preparing to despatch a force of five big warships and perhaps 2000 soldiers to the East. Castries immediately realised if the Dutch lost the Cape, it would have an adverse effect on the French islands in the Indian Ocean. On the same day he informed D'Hector (Commander in Brest) that the British were preparing five ships of the line and 2000 soldiers under the command of Admiral Palliser. As their aim might be the Cape, D'Hector was ordered to get three or four coppered ships of the line ready for service in the East and to suggest a commander.⁵³ Days later (on 30 December) D'Hector was ordered to send a fast warship (*Le Sylphide*) to warn the Cape and Mauritius. The speed at which intelligence traveled and command decisions were made, was amazing for the time.

The French immediately made plans to thwart a British attempt on the Cape. They realised that speed was of the essence and that the winner would be able to secure the Cape. Warships, transport vessels and troops were equipped and prepared, while the expedition was kept well secret. By the end of February it was not yet known who had command of the squadron and the British had no inkling that an expedition for the Cape and the East were being

⁵⁰ A. Linder, *The Swiss Regiment Meuron at the Cape*, pp.11-2 and 18-9.

⁵¹ NAN VOC4536, Rapport van de bewindhebber J. Graafland, 9/7/1781.

⁵² See H.W. Richmond, *The Navy in India 1763-1783*, pp.130-1; and L.C.F. Turner, *The Cape of Good Hope and the Trafalgar Campaign*, p.93.

⁵³ Castries – D'Hector, 27/12/1780, in L.C.F. Turner, *The Cape of Good Hope and the Trafalgar Campaign*, p.95.

fitted out.⁵⁴ Soon afterwards De Suffren was appointed in command with the rank of *Chef d'Escadre* – he flew the Broad Pennant of a Commodore.

Pierre Andre de Suffren Saint Tropez was a capable and experienced commander, holds a unique place among French seamen and is in the front rank of naval commanders. He was born on 17 July 1729, the third son of the Marquis de Saint Tropez. He joined the French Navy as Midshipman in 1743 and saw much action during the Austrian Succession War as well as during the Seven Years War. He was captured by the British twice, first by the famous Admiral Hawke in an action in the Bay of Biscay in 1747 and then by Admiral Boscawen off Lagos in 1757.⁵⁵ Between the wars he served with the Order of the Knights of Malta and was promoted to Knight Commander in the Order. In 1771 he was appointed to a special training squadron of the French Navy, aimed at giving additional grounding to gifted officers as his nerve and skill in handling his ship were highly commended by his superiors. As the Captain of a ship of the line he served with distinction in the Atlantic and was instrumental in capturing a valuable British convoy. Despite his criticism of his superior, Admiral D'Estaing, he was highly regarded and it's probably due to D'Estaing's influence that he was selected as Commodore in 1781.⁵⁶ De Suffren was an extremely energetic and formidable commander; always eager to tackle the enemy and do battle. Napoleon is known to have exclaimed that if only he had a naval man of De Suffren's aptitude, things would have been better!⁵⁷

De Suffren's orders were issued on 17 March and were clear: The Cape was not his objective but he was implored to reach it as quickly as possible and to safeguard it against attack. As the British suspected a leak in the Admiralty, false orders for Johnstone and Medows were issued which indicated that their objective was Dutch trade and VOC possessions in the Indies. It reached Paris and The Hague, putting the French somewhat off guard, but (probably to Britain's detriment) it only resulted in De Suffren being reinforced with another ship of the line.⁵⁸ De Suffren was ordered to disembark his troops at the Cape and then hurry to Mauritius.

Generally French warships of the time were faster and better designed than their British counterparts. The French Navy was tactically also well drilled, which was the result of much effort that went into its improvement between the two wars. The French Navy saw their primary functions as the destruction of enemy commerce, support to amphibious operations and

⁵⁴ H.W. Richmond, *The Navy in India 1763-1783*, pp.132-3.

⁵⁵ O. Warner, *Great Sea Battles*, p.121.

⁵⁶ Suffren Saint Tropez, Pierre Andre de in http://88.1911encyclopedia.org/S/SU/SUFFREN_SAIN_TROPEZ_PIERRE_ANDRE_DE.htm (accessed in June 2004).

⁵⁷ H.W. Richmond, *The Navy in India 1763-1783*, p.142.

assistance with colonial conquests, while naval battles was not seen as the first objective since it often caused severe damage with limited gains. French naval commanders asserted that to capture a convoy was more valuable to the King than attacking an enemy fleet. Hence, the French approach was to shoot high and damage an enemy's rigging, to perhaps prevent an all-out fight, while the British fired into the hull to damage and sink enemy vessels, not to avoid battle.⁵⁹ De Suffren however felt different – he emphasised the battle, and knew if an enemy's fleet could be eliminated, other objectives would be achieved with more ease.

On 22 March a large fleet consisting of 25 ships of the line and more than one hundred transports and supply ships departed from Brest. The greatest portion of the fleet, under the command of the Comte De Grasse, was destined for the West Indies, while De Suffren's squadron consisted of five ships of the line, one corvette and eight transports.⁶⁰ His flagship was *Le Héros* (74) while the other vessels were *L'Hannibal* (74), Captain De Tremigon; *L'Artésien* (64), Captain De Cardaillac Chevalier de Malthe; *Le Sphinx* (64), Captain De Duchillon; *Le Vengeur* (64), Captain Le Chavalier de Forbin; and the corvette *La Fortune* (18).⁶¹ *L'Hannibal* and *La Fortune* were the only vessels that were not coppered. Onboard the eight transports were 1100 men of the Austrasia and Pondicherry Regiments, a hundred artillerymen and ammunition supplies. To keep the British guessing about their true objective, the whole fleet sailed to Madeira, where they parted company on 29 March.⁶² De Suffren made sail south as fast as possible, hoping to reach the Cape before the British. The British had a running start and he had no idea of Johnstone's whereabouts.⁶³

French writers are often critical of the fact that Suffren only departed on 22 March. However, the French had to gain Dutch permission before they could sail. As late as 8 February their Ambassador in The Hague still implored the States General to make "their wishes known on this matter" as they did not want "unpleasantness in ... offering help, or by provisionally sending vessels and troops".⁶⁴ Nearly ten days later (17 February), the Dutch thanked the French King for "giving the necessary orders so that the squadron destined for the East Indies may stop at the Cape, may protect this settlement and may warn against the imminent attack by

⁵⁸ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of sea power upon history*, p.421; and H.W. Richmond, *The Navy in India 1763-1783*, p.133-5.

⁵⁹ A. van Hengel, 'Het karakter van den Zeeoorlog en de Bescherming van Handelsscheepvaart' in *Marineblad*, 39 (1924), p.445.

⁶⁰ H.W. Richmond, *The Navy in India 1763-1783*, p.136.

⁶¹ Anonymous Pamphlet, *Blake's Remarks on Com. Johnstone's account...*, p.9.

⁶² H.W. Richmond, *The Navy in India 1763-1783*, p.142.

⁶³ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of sea power upon history*, p.421.

⁶⁴ L.C.F. Turner, *The Cape of Good Hope and the Trafalgar Campaign*, Vergennes – La Vauguyon, 8/2/1781, p.96.

the English".⁶⁵ As a result De Suffren's final orders were only issued on 17 March and it included detail concerning the arrangements with the Dutch.⁶⁶

Typical of the British way of thinking, the first line of defence, or attack for that matter, was the Navy. Authors like Richmond was critical of the poor blockade of Brest and argued that the Royal Navy should have brought De Grasse and De Suffren to battle in European waters, as Lord Howe stated at the time; "not only the fate of the West Indies, but the whole fortune of the war, might have been decided, almost without risk in the Bay of Biscay".⁶⁷ The British however placed much emphasis on relieving Gibraltar and a large force was sent there in March. De Suffren and De Grasse could therefore sail without hindrance. As one of De Suffren's ships, *L'Hannibal* (74) was transferred from De Grasse's squadron to De Suffren shortly before departure and did not have sufficient water on board for such a long voyage, the French had to put into Porto Praya. An encounter with Johnstone's squadron became inevitable!

4. THE EVENTS AT PORTO PRAYA AND ITS EFFECT

4.1. The Action at Porto Praya

On the Johnstone expedition's fourth day at sea the cutter *HMS Rattlesnake* captured a Dutch merchantman after a brief action and on 10 April they anchored at Porto Praya in the Cape Verde Islands, a Portuguese possession. The next day the process of watering and provisioning the ships commenced.⁶⁸

The bay at Porto Praya runs from east to west with an opening of about one and a half miles in the south. As the prevailing wind direction was north to north-east, ships would lie close to the shore in the northern side of the bay. The British ships anchored in an irregular west-northwest formation. Johnstone did not anchor in a secure way to be prepared for a surprise attack, not because he was in a neutral port, but he considered his mission a secret.⁶⁹ To provide protection to the convoy the warships had to be placed on the seaward side, bow-to-stern in a firing line with springs on their cables, while the convoy had to be moored behind. Instead they were anchored in "a manner that would be considered un-seamanlike even in time

⁶⁵ L.C.F. Turner, *The Cape of Good Hope and the Trafalgar Campaign*, La Vauguyon – Vergennes, 17/2/1781, p.97.

⁶⁶ NAN VOC4536, Rapport van de bewindhebber J. Graafland, 9/7/1781.

⁶⁷ Quoted in L.C.F. Turner, *The Cape of Good Hope and the Trafalgar Campaign*, p.97.

⁶⁸ NAUK ADM52/2506, Logbook of the *HMS Romney*, for the period 24/7/1780 to 23/7/1781, see 10/4/1781.

of peace”.⁷⁰ Johnstone afterwards complained that he ordered some of the vessels to anchor at alternative positions, but that they did not adhere to his orders. Yet, a wartime naval commander mooring his fleet in a foreign port had to be prepared for all contingencies.

Though some sources suggest that Johnstone had prior knowledge of a French squadron on its way to the Cape, there is little proof of it. The only claim is by a British officer, Major Henry Rooke, who stated that on arriving at Porto Praya they heard of a French frigate asking the authorities a few weeks earlier to prepare refreshments for a French fleet set to arrive in April.⁷¹ There is however, no evidence that the French planned to replenish at the Cape Verde Islands. They wished to get to the Cape as soon as possible and the stop was made because *L'Hannibal* required water.

The ship of the line, with its heavy guns on the broadsides, was the basic fighting unit in naval warfare. Tactics therefore dictated that ships fight in a line-ahead formation as they could then bring most of their fire to bear. However, in naval battles decision was often very difficult to achieve and if a fleets obtain no clear advantage, they could break their position and retire. To achieve victory one side had to surprise or catch its opponent unawares, concentrate its firepower against part of an opposing fleet, or defeat an opponent in detail. When squadrons had to act together one of their greatest problems were that of station keeping. Often the inability or poor ship handling of individual ships could impede on the performance of a whole squadron. Good fleet work was not the same as good seamanship and had to be nurtured by giving officers regular practice in fleet manoeuvre. Captains and ships had to be at peak performance during conflict and as a squadron relied on teamwork, good individual ability to manoeuvre ships were not enough – without cohesion a fleet or a squadron was not an effective tactical unit.⁷²

Early on the morning of 16 April the French approached Porto Praya and as De Suffren wanted to waste no time, *L'Hannibal's* water casks were already out on deck. As they approached from the east the British ships were hidden from view until about 08:45, when the leading ship, *L'Artésien*, rounded the point and saw the British ships at anchor. Captain De Cardaillac immediately signalled the information to his Commodore. De Suffren “of ardent disposition and inborn military genius by natural temper”,⁷³ could make quick decisions. He

⁶⁹ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of sea power upon history*, pp.421-2.

⁷⁰ S. Lee, (ed), *Dictionary of National Biography*, XXX, p.76.

⁷¹ G.M. Theal, *History of Africa South of the Zambesi*, III, pp.198-9.

⁷² S.B.A. Willis, ‘Fleet Performance and Capabilities in the Eighteenth Century Royal Navy’ in *War in History*, 11 (4), 2004, pp.374-5, 385 and 388.

⁷³ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of sea power upon history*, p.422.

realised it must be the squadron destined for the Cape and that he had only two choices: press on to the Cape without delay in anticipation of getting there first, or attack immediately in the hope of crippling his enemy and delaying its progress. Though his squadron were scattered as some of the ships did not sail well, he decided to utilise the element of surprise and attack at once. De Suffren ordered his ships to clear for action at anchor and he moved to the van with his flagship *Le Héros*. As Portugal was neutral, it posed a dilemma in terms of the international law and De Cardaillac hailed De Suffren, asking what was to be done if the Portuguese forts open fire. The reply was typical: "open fire in return".⁷⁴

At about 09:00 the *HMS Isis*, and soon afterwards the *HMS Diana*, reported 12 sails at sea to the north-east. Many of British sailors and soldiers were ashore watering their ships and some of the ships' decks were stacked with provisions and lumber. Those ashore (apparently about 1500 men) were ordered to join their respective ships and Johnstone went to the *Isis* to view the strange sails from the masthead.⁷⁵

At about 10:00 Johnstone signalled his ships to prepare for battle and half an hour later, five ships of the line flying French colours and one a Broad Pennant came round the point steering a west-north-westerly course.⁷⁶ It was clear that the French ships were preparing for an engagement, as they were passing springs to their anchor cables along the outside of the ships. The French fired at the outward British ships at 10:45 and Johnstone signalled his ships to engage the enemy.⁷⁷ *Le Héros*, sailing close-hauled around the point, immediately attacked with "much courage and seeming determination", fired her broadside into the *Isis* and anchored within two cables of the *Monmouth*, *Jupiter*, *Hero* and *Isis*.⁷⁸ The *Jupiter*, *Monmouth*, *Hero* and *Isis* "being in clear situations" immediately engaged the enemy, but there were transport ships between the *Romney* and *Jason* and the French ships. As a result they did not keep up a constant fire and Johnstone and Medows went onboard the *Hero* as she was the ship directly opposite the enemy.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Anonymous Pamphlet, *Blake's Remarks on Com. Johnstone's account...*, p. 35; and G.M. Theal, *History of Africa South of the Zambesi*, III, p.200.

⁷⁵ NAUK ADM51/4313, Captain's log, *HMS Romney*, 16/4/1781; and Anonymous Pamphlet, *Blake's Remarks on Com. Johnstone's account...*, p.28.

⁷⁶ NAUK ADM52/2506, Logbook of the *HMS Romney*, for the period 24/7/1780 to 23/7/1781, see 16/4/1781; and ADM52/2506, J. Duane, Master, Journal of the proceedings of *HMS Romney*, Commodore George Johnstone, commencing 24/7/1780 to 24/6/1781, see 16/4/1781.

⁷⁷ NAUK ADM52/2343, Masters Log of the Proceedings of His Majesty's Ship *Hero*, for the period 1/11/1780 to 8/6/1784. Attached to the Log is an undated loose report in the form of a formal submission entitled "Remarks on board His Majesty's Ship *Hero* at St Jago, April 1781".

⁷⁸ Anonymous Pamphlet, *Blake's Remarks on Com. Johnstone's account...*, p.29.

⁷⁹ NAUK ADM51/4313, Captain's log, *HMS Romney*, 16/4/1781.

De Suffren, with enemy ships around him, was closely followed by the second French ship, *L'Hannibal*, whose decks were still full of casks as Captain De Tremigon apparently did not realise that the De Suffren would disregard the neutrality of the port. He boldly passed to windward, cleared for action and anchored just forward of *Le Héros*. Because *L'Hannibal*'s decks were crammed, all her guns could not immediately be brought to bear and De Tremigon had to pay with his life for his first mistake.⁸⁰ Soon these ships brought both their broadsides to bear, while the third French ship, *L'Artésien* followed closely and anchored astern. She boarded some East Indiamen, while the *HMS Hero* went over to the attack and actually boarded *L'Artésien* in an effort to capture her, but it did not succeed. Captain De Cardaillac of *L'Artésien* was killed in the action and *L'Artésien* meanwhile drifted downwind into another ship.⁸¹

The two rear French ships, *Le Vengeur* (64) and *Le Sphinx* (64), were still far astern and their ship handling was poorer. They did not sail close-hauled enough around the point, with the result that they were to leeward, hardly within gun range, did not anchor, participated little in the action and only fired at some of the East Indiamen as they passed along.⁸² The rest of the French squadron, the corvette and eight transports, stood well off.

The British had superior concentration of firepower as effectively only two of De Suffren ships bore the brunt of the crack and rapid gunnery the Royal Navy was renowned for. They fired with impunity and about ten minutes into the action the mizzen topmast and ensign of *Le Héros* was shot away.⁸³ The *Hero* (Captain Hawker), *Monmouth* (Captain Alms) and *Jupiter* (Captain Pasley) kept up a damaging and consistent fire forcing De Suffren to cut his cable and make sail at about 12:00, while *L'Hannibal*, ahead of him was now in the crossfire from all the British vessels. After close to two hours of gunnery, *L'Hannibal* was in a bad way, her mizzen mast and topmasts were shot away, her Captain was killed and she had nearly two hundred casualties. When her colours were shot away, firing ceased as the British thought she had struck, but it continued again. She cut her cable and heeled around, but had much damage to her masts and rigging with yards in different ways and her sails shot to pieces.⁸⁴ Both French ships passed under the stern of *Isis* and Captain Evelyn Sutton thought his ship might be boarded, but they fired at her rigging, cutting it to pieces and damaged her masts. At the same

⁸⁰ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of sea power upon history*, p.423.

⁸¹ NAUK ADM52/2343, Masters Log of the Proceedings of His Majesty's Ship *Hero*, for the period 1/11/1780 to 8/6/1784 and the undated report "Remarks on board His Majesty's Ship *Hero* at St Jago, April 1781". See also G.M. Theal, *History of Africa South of the Zambesi*, III, p.201.

⁸² NMM SAN/F/27/28, Sutton – Stevens, 28/4/1781; and Anonymous Pamphlet, *Blake's Remarks on Com. Johnstone's account...*, p.30.

⁸³ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of sea power upon history*, p.423.

⁸⁴ Anonymous Pamphlet, *Blake's Remarks on Com. Johnstone's account...*, pp.31-2.

time *L'Hannibal's* mizzen topmast went overboard, dragged in the water and it got entangled with *Isis's* anchor cable, which provided *Isis* with the opportunity of "putting a broadside into the ship".⁸⁵ As *L'Hannibal* pointed out of the bay, her fore and main topmasts also went by the board, and then her mainmast and foremast followed – "one after the other".⁸⁶ The *Heros* immediately turned around and took the disabled *L'Hannibal* in tow.⁸⁷

Johnstone's ships were in disarray and as his flagship was anchored amongst the supply ships she did not properly bring her guns to bear. The French had fired as rapidly as they could at the anchored fleet and did much damage to some of the anchored ships, while in the confusion a number of the transports had fired into the East Indiamen.⁸⁸ Some of the smaller naval vessels were also damaged: the *Terror* lost her bowsprit and foremast, caught fire during the action, cut her cable and drifted to sea, but her crew managed to save her and she limped back into port. The *Infernal* was captured by the French, but they later abandoned her, while the sloop *Oporto* lost her foremast and bowsprit. The *San Carlos* was "knocked to pieces",⁸⁹ while the supply ship *Edward* was captured, nearly sank and was abandoned, later to be recovered and towed back. The East Indiamen took much of the rap as the *Hinchinbrook* was captured and many of the others suffered heavy damages from fire to their masts, rigging and hulls. Some heavy fighting took place on the East Indiamen *Fortitude*: when men from *L'Artesien* boarded her, Captain Jenkinson and men of the 98th Regiment (who were on board), provided stiff resistance and fought them off with a constant fire. Though Theal suggested that the *Fortitude* was captured, there is no proof that she arrived at the Cape with the French squadron.⁹⁰ On 17 April British vessels that pursued the French for a while, were able to retake the captured *Hinchinbrook* with a prize crew of 24 Frenchmen on board.⁹¹

Exact casualty figures are difficult to establish, but it seems that despite the heavy fighting in close quarters, casualties were relatively light. British casualties were 42 killed and 142 wounded, while the *Isis* had only four killed and five wounded, but she took much fire in her

⁸⁵ NMM SAN/F/27/28, Sutton – Stevens, 28 /4/1781.

⁸⁶ NAUK ADM52/2343, Masters Log of the Proceedings of His Majesty's Ship *Hero*, for the period 1/11/1780 to 8/6/1784, and the undated report "Remarks on board His Majesty's Ship *Hero* at St Jago, April 1781". See also ADM51/4313, Captain's log, *HMS Romney*, 16/4/1781.

⁸⁷ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of sea power upon history*, p.423.

⁸⁸ Anonymous Pamphlet, *Blake's Remarks on Com. Johnstone's account...*, p.30.

⁸⁹ NMM SAN/F/27/33, Johnstone –Sandwich, 2/5/1781.

⁹⁰ Anonymous Pamphlet, *Blake's Remarks on Com. Johnstone's account ...*, pp.35-7; and G.M. Theal, *History of Africa South of the Zambesi*, III, p.201.

⁹¹ NAUK ADM52/2343, Masters Log of the Proceedings of His Majesty's Ship *Hero*, for the period 1/11/1780 to 8/6/1784, see 17/4/1781; and Anonymous Pamphlet, *Blake's Remarks on Com. Johnstone's account...*, p.32.

rigging. French casualties were reputed to be higher. The British took 25 prisoners of war and the French 21.⁹²

When Johnstone and Medows returned to the *Romney* at 13:00 Johnstone summoned all his Captains, but the Captains of the *Isis* and *Diana* did not turn up. An hour later he issued orders that they had to slip or cut their cables at 15:00, “as he intended to proceed to sea and engage the enemy”.⁹³ *Isis* and *Diana* did not follow, while *Jason* took in water due to battle damage. Captain Sutton informed Johnstone that the *Isis* was crippled and not ready to sail due to damage to her masts, yards, rigging and sails, but they were repairing it as fast as possible.⁹⁴ Despite Sutton’s complaints that every “mast being wounded, the mizzen yard upon deck, the mizzen topsail yard gone and the rigging cut to pieces”,⁹⁵ the *Isis* also got underway a few minutes later. When *Isis* approached the rest of the squadron at about 16:00, Johnstone ordered his Captains to form a battle line (line ahead).⁹⁶ He hailed Sutton, asking if he was ready to engage the enemy (about six miles away). Sutton apparently answered “as ready as possible”, but at that moment the damaged foretopmast of the *Isis* went by the board.⁹⁷

Outside the bay, with the disabled *Hannibal* in tow, the French formed a line abreast and sent their convoy off under full sail south, while the warships prepared for action. The British gained on them, and by 18:30 with the fleets about two miles apart, the French formed a battle line standing ready. The *Isis* and *Monmouth* were dropping astern⁹⁸ and Johnstone ordered Sutton to “carry all the sails” his ship can. Sutton, however, could not do it because of the damage his mainmast had received.⁹⁹ It was now getting dark and the sea became rougher, which made it impossible to use the lower gun decks. Johnstone realised he could not finish the action decisively before dark and that they might miss the French during the night. As his convoy still had to be protected, he decided to terminate the pursuit.¹⁰⁰

⁹² See the discrepancy between Anonymous Pamphlet, *Blake’s Remarks on Com. Johnstone’s account...*, pp.35-6, G.M. Theal, *History of Africa South of the Zambesi*, III, p.202 as well as NMM SAN/F/27/28, Sutton – Stevens, 28/4/1781.

⁹³ NAUK ADM51/4313, Captain’s log, *HMS Romney*, 16/4/1781.

⁹⁴ NAUK ADM52/2506, Logbook of the *HMS Romney*, for the period 24/7/1780 to 23/7/1781, see 16/4/1781.

⁹⁵ NMM SAN/F/27/28, Sutton – Stevens, 28/4/1781.

⁹⁶ NAUK ADM52/2343, Masters Log of the Proceedings of His Majesty’s Ship *Hero*, for the period 1/11/1780 to 8/6/1784, undated report “Remarks on board His Majesty’s Ship *Hero* at St Jago, April 1781”. See also ADM51/4313, Captain’s log, *HMS Romney*, 16/4/1781.

⁹⁷ NMM SAN/F/27/28, Sutton – Stevens, 28/4/1781.

⁹⁸ NAUK ADM51/4313, Captain’s log, *HMS Romney*, 16/4/1781.

⁹⁹ NMM SAN/F/27/28, Sutton – Stevens, 28/4/1781.

¹⁰⁰ NAUK ADM51/4313, Captain’s log, *HMS Romney*, 16/4/1781; and ADM52/2343, Masters Log of His Majesty’s Ship *Hero*, undated report “Remarks on board His Majesty’s Ship *Hero* at St Jago, April 1781”.

De Suffren wasted no time and sailed straight for the Cape, as fast as he could. By using spare spars and rigging, *L'Hannibal* was fitted with a jury-rig at sea. *Le Héros* arrived at the Cape on 20 June 1781,¹⁰¹ while the other warships, troopships and transports arrived during the following few days.

One can question the wisdom of De Suffren's attack as he did ignore international law and attacked his opponent in a neutral port. However, he must be judged against the background of the aim of his mission, which was firstly to protect the Cape. To succeed, he had to get to the Cape first. He knew the British fleet was an obstacle in his way, yet as he was unaware of its whereabouts, a search would be a tremendous waste of time and he made a run for the Cape. If the two forces were to meet en route, De Suffren was the type of commander who realised immediately that he had to try and put his enemy out of the race altogether. As a result he attacked, even though he thought the British force was greater than his. His clear grasp of the strategic situation is apparent as he remarked that "the destruction of the English squadron would cut off the root of all the plans and projects of that expedition, gain us for a long time the superiority in India, a superiority whence might result a glorious peace, and hinder England from reaching the Cape before me – an object which has been fulfilled and was the principle aim of my mission".¹⁰²

The fact that the British were disorganised and at least two of the 50-gun ships were not ready to fend off an enemy, is indicative of the fact that De Suffren made the right decision. On the other hand, the poor ship handling by two French Captains (of *Le Vengeur* and *Le Sphinx*), resulted in De Suffren's attack being deprived of the firepower another two ships of the line could have brought to bear on the surprised British. Their actions were more indicative of the often indecisive way in which the French Navy was handled at the time and caused De Suffren's attack to lose much of its potential impact.

Johnstone's squadron was poorly anchored. The ships of the line and the 50-gunned vessels should have formed a gun-line with the frigates and even some of the armed transports in support. Though De Suffren had more ships of the line, in terms of firepower Johnstone had a clear advantage in this situation. A contemporary pamphleteer made a count, stating that he had no less than 600 guns to his disposal, which were 244 more than the French.¹⁰³ It might be so, but the fact of the matter is that the French ships sailing into the bay could fire only as they bore, while if Johnstone prepared his anchorage correctly with springs to the anchor cables of

¹⁰¹ Dagregister, 20/6/1781, in K.M. Jeffreys, *Kaapse argiefstukken, 1781*, p.251.

¹⁰² De Suffren quoted in A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of sea power upon history*, p.424.

¹⁰³ Anonymous Pamphlet, *Blake's Remarks on Com. Johnstone's account...*, p.10.

his ships, De Suffren would have sailed into a hail of deadly fire from stably anchored and prepared ships. Also, Johnstone did not utilise his frigates or the firepower of the other ships, which was important in such close quarters where not only long range guns could bear on the enemy. Finally, he seemed reluctant to tackle the French if the odds were not stacked in his favour and he pressured all the Captains to be in the line. Yet, quicker action against the damaged French ships with his undamaged vessels might have paid off, if he was prepared to take the risk.

On 30 April 1781 Johnstone wrote to Sandwich that many of his armed transports were in a “disagreeable situation” due to the damage they incurred during the French attack.¹⁰⁴ In another letter to Sandwich, marked “private”, Johnstone informed him about his “success” at Porto Praya, but crudely complained about the commanders of the transport vessels, calling the one “mad”, another was “always drunk”, one “negligent, often drunk and always mean” and yet another “rough, wild, brutal”; they were bad men in “inferior stations ... neither seamen nor navigators”.¹⁰⁵ Many of the naval officers and crews were worthless, notably Sutton, who was “unfit to command a man of war” and his ship was in a worse condition than any of the merchantmen. The only officers he saw in a positive light were General Medows and the two Lieutenants in command of the bomb vessel and the fire-ship.

Sutton became the scapegoat for the fiasco and Johnstone described his conduct as “unbecoming”. Captain Thomas Lumley received command of the *Isis* and Johnstone informed Sutton that he “found it necessary to put you under arrest to be tried by Court Martial for disobedience of my verbal orders and of my public signals in not cutting your cables and putting to sea after the enemy”.¹⁰⁶ Johnstone asserted that they did not capitalise on the victory they obtained because Sutton prevented them from engaging the enemy.¹⁰⁷

It is apparent from Sutton’s list of the damages that the *Isis* did indeed obtain much damage to her rigging and all three masts. She also took many shots into the hull and her rudder was damaged. When her foretopmast went over the side, they had to cut all its rigging away to clear the deck. Johnstone, however, considered the damages to the *Isis* very “trifling”, stating that she was “just as fit to fight as ever”.¹⁰⁸ Sutton disagreed with Johnstone’s assertions and wrote several letters appealing for the court martial to take place immediately, maintaining that he did the Service no harm. Johnstone agreed to a date while at Porto Praya, but then

¹⁰⁴ NAUK ADM1/54, Commodore George Johnstone, 1781-1784, Johnstone – Sandwich, 30/4/1781.

¹⁰⁵ NMM SAN/F/27/33, Johnstone – Sandwich, 2/5/1781.

¹⁰⁶ NAUK ADM1/54, Commodore George Johnstone, 1781-1784, Johnstone – Sutton, 22/4/1781.

¹⁰⁷ NMM SAN/F/27/28, Sutton – Stevens, 28/4/1781.

¹⁰⁸ NMM SAN/F/27/33, Johnstone – Sandwich, 2/5/1781.

cancelled it.¹⁰⁹ He later claimed that since the success of his mission depended on arriving at the Cape before the French, there was not enough time.¹¹⁰ Sutton stayed under arrest despite several appeals for his court martial to be at sea, or at Saldanha Bay, as the “laws of England does not permit long imprisonment”.¹¹¹ It was then set to take place at St Helena Island, yet while at the island Johnstone only complained to Sandwich about his incompetent officers, made new appointments, and referred the Sutton case to the Admiralty.¹¹² In October and November 1783 the Admiralty wanted to know from Johnstone exactly what the charges against Sutton were.¹¹³ Eventually Sutton’s court martial was cancelled and he then started civil proceedings against Johnstone.

To get back to the defence of the Cape: Johnstone knew that it was a race to reach the Cape first and that the strongest naval force would be in a commanding position at the Cape. In the letter to Hillsborough (30 April 1781), he stated that “if the principal force of the enemy should arrive before us ... it might prove equally fatal to the object of the expedition”.¹¹⁴ But he expected the French to send their damaged ships to the West Indies, which would provide him with a superior naval force at the Cape.

The French did not achieve a tactical victory at Porto Praya, but it was undoubtedly an important strategic success. De Suffren threw his enemy off balance and delayed him by doing battle, which allowed them to reach the Cape first and secure it. De Suffren knew that the first line of defence against maritime power projection was to stop an enemy fleet at sea. It could indeed be inferred that the Cape of Good Hope was saved at Porto Praya.

4.2. The Arrival of the French Force at the Cape

Though *Le Serapis* brought the good news that French reinforcements were on their way, the Cape had no way of knowing who would arrive first – the British or the French. As their defences were wholly inadequate, this would determine the fate of the Cape.

¹⁰⁹ NAUK ADM1/54, Commodore George Johnstone, 1781-1784, Sutton – Johnstone, 22/4/1781, 23/4/1781 and 24/4/1781; and NMM SAN/F/27/28, Sutton – Stevens, 28/4/1781.

¹¹⁰ Anonymous Pamphlet, *Letters which passed between Commodore Johnstone and Capt. Evelyn Sutton in 1781, with respect to the bringing Captain Sutton to Trial*, pp.iii-iv.

¹¹¹ NAUK ADM1/54, Commodore George Johnstone, 1781-1784, Sutton – Johnstone, 22/6/1781, 25/6/1781, 18/7/1781 and 22/7/1781.

¹¹² NMM SAN/F/28/33, Johnstone – Sandwich, 22/8/1781; and NAUK ADM1/54, Commodore George Johnstone, 1781-1784, Johnstone – Stephens, 23/7/1781 and 21/8/1781.

¹¹³ NAUK ADM1/54, Commodore George Johnstone, 1781-1784, See correspondence between Johnstone and the Admiralty during 1783.

¹¹⁴ Anonymous Pamphlet, *Blake’s Remarks on Com. Johnstone’s account...*, p.34.

Wednesday 20 June was a day full of anxiety and excitement at the Cape. When the Lion's Head lookout signalled at 10:00 that seven ships were approaching, it was feared that it might be an enemy squadron and "raakte in deese plaatse alles in Rep en Roer ...".¹¹⁵ The signal guns were fired and a general call-up or *generaal opontbod* took place, the red flag was hoisted on the Leerdam bastion, the Garrison took up its positions, the militia mustered in front of the *Burgherwaghuis* behind their standards and the Council of Policy met in the Castle. All this apparently happened "seer Schielijk en in verEyschte ordre", with everybody on their posts, at the ready, waiting for orders. Van Plettenberg then mounted his horse and rode to a vantage point from where he had a clear view. When he returned at about 14:00 with the news that it was French ships on their way to False Bay, it caused "onuijtspreeklijke vreugde!"¹¹⁶ The militia stood down, but were ordered to immediately return in the case of an alarm.

Through the night and during the next day, despite heavy rain, burghers from "Tijger-en koe Bergen, 't Swart land, Stellenbosch, Drakensteijn, 't Hottentots Holland"¹¹⁷ were pouring into Cape Town "in volle waapenen Caabwaards te spoeden, en dat wel in een zwaare reegen, heevige Stormwind en dikke duysternis, zodanig doorjaagde ...".¹¹⁸ The barrier to the town was closed and many had no protection against the weather. Moreover, as it was not an enemy fleet, they were summarily dismissed the next day. The Council of Policy was impressed by the good reaction of the militia and their willingness to defend the Cape: "veele der Ingezeeten hierop, met de meeste Spoed, in volle Wapenen alhier zijn verscheenen, en dus met 'er daad hebben betoond haare bereijdwillingheid om als Eer en Eed Lieve Burghers, het Land tegens den Vijand te beschermen". However, some burghers, described as "onwaardige bloodaards en veragters" did not react and since the threat to the Cape still existed, the burghers were reminded of their responsibility with a *Placcaat*.¹¹⁹

On 21 June Van Plettenberg received a report concerning the arrival of the French ships as well as news of the battle at Porto Praya from Christoffel Brandt (Post Holder in Simon's Town).¹²⁰ The warships arrived during the first two days, four French armed transports arrived on Saturday 30 June and by 3 July 1781 all De Suffren's ships were at the Cape. The French corvette *La Fortune* (16) that arrived on 22 June, departed again on 27 June to patrol the coast

¹¹⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister, 20/06/1781, p.250.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister, 21/06/1781, p.251.

¹¹⁸ See the correspondence from the burghers led by Meyburg, Roos and others to Van Plettenberg, 12/2/1782 in *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 13/2/1782, p.67.

¹¹⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 3/7/1781, pp.96-7.

¹²⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister, 21/6/1781, p.251.

between Saldanha Bay and Hout Bay and to escort straggling French transport vessels. She entered Saldanha Bay on 30 June and arrived back from her patrol on Sunday 15 July.¹²¹

When De Suffren arrived at the Castle on Sunday 24 June, he received a fifteen-gun salute from the *Couvre face Imhoff*. At the same time troops of the Austrasie Regiment and an artillery company were marching to the Cape, arriving by midday on 25 June.¹²² Troops from the Pondicherry Regiment disembarked in Simon's Bay on 2 July, marched to Cape Town, and arrived the next afternoon.¹²³ These crucial reinforcements bolstered the defence of the Cape significantly.

There was much joy in the Netherlands and in Batavia when they received the news that De Suffren had arrived at the Cape in time.¹²⁴ The High Council of the Indies understood that the first line of defence against maritime power projection was naval interjection and they were very impressed by the "voortreffelijke dienst door de Franse Vloot" which secured the Cape.¹²⁵ With French aid the Cape could now be defended against a "redoutabelen aanval", but the Governor-General still expressed the vain hope that French assistance would also arrive in the Indies to substantially improve the VOC position there.¹²⁶

5. THE DUTCH DISASTER AT SALDANHA BAY

Johnstone repaired the battle damage to his ships at Porto Praya and then sailed for the Cape. He still planned to capture the Cape and hoped that De Suffren had sent his damaged ships to the West Indies, or was forced to put into a South American port for repairs. Johnstone's fleet watered in Brazil, and as they reached Cape waters, he despatched one of his fastest frigates, the *HMS Active* (Captain Mackenzie), to do reconnaissance ahead of the main body of sail.

After completing her repairs in Saldanha Bay, the *Held Woltemade* proceeded to Ceylon on 28 June.¹²⁷ When the *Active* encountered the *Held Woltemade* at sea, south of False Bay, on 4 July she flew French colours and hailed them in French. The Dutch were not suspicious and provided information concerning Suffren's arrival. Mackenzie then hoisted British colours and ran his guns out – *Held Woltemade* was compelled to surrender without a shot. She carried

¹²¹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister, 22/6/1781, 27/6/1781, 30/6/1781, 2/07/1781 and 15/7/1781, pp.251-4 and 257.

¹²² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister, 24/06/1781 and 25/06/1781, p.252.

¹²³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister, 3/7/1781, p.254.

¹²⁴ J.C. de Jonge, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Zeewezen*, IV, p.470.

¹²⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Inkomende Brieven, Goeverneur-Generaal en Raad – Van Plettenberg, 18/10/1782, pp.358-9.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

a large sum of money destined for Ceylon and her crew told the British that a number of VOC return ships were at anchor in Saldanha Bay.¹²⁸

Mackenzie reported it to Johnstone. Since De Suffren had a slight superiority in ships and French troops reinforced the Cape, Johnstone decided not to attack the Cape.¹²⁹ This is the typical impact of a *fleet-in-being*. The mere fact that De Suffren's ships were available to defend the Cape, and not French actions in Cape waters, dissuaded Johnstone from attacking and gave the French temporary sea control of the waters around the Cape peninsula. Johnstone instead decided that perhaps money was worth more than glory and to rather capture the richly laden VOC ships at anchor in Saldanha Bay. He explained his plan to his officers on 20 July. The ships of the line would handle the main attack against the ships at anchor, but as Johnstone was convinced that the Dutch would surrender after the first broadside, he told his Captains that their main duty would be to prevent the Dutch from setting their ships alight.¹³⁰

On Friday 20 July, a clear day with a fresh northerly breeze, the British made their landfall to the northwest of Saldanha Bay. On 21 July they hoisted French colours and approached the land. At 10:00 they could make out the masts of the ships above the land and saw the five large East Indiamen at anchor in the Hoedjies Bay. After entering Saldanha Bay they hoisted British colours,¹³¹ cleared their ships for action and formed a battle line.¹³²

The Dutch lookout, Corporal J. Stofberg, hoisted the warning signal from *De Uitkijck*, Postberg, at 09:30. The British ships still flew French flags at this stage, but an hour later sixteen ships were in the bay and hoisted British flags. Stofberg counted a further 17 ships at sea, standing to the north of the entrance to Saldanha Bay.¹³³ Wagenaar stated (in 1790) that Johnstone's surprise was aided by the fact that fog surrounded Saldanha Bay that morning,¹³⁴ however, no proof exist of this, the British logbooks indicate that it was clear, while the

¹²⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister, 30/6/1781, p.253.

¹²⁸ CA C554, Inkomende Brieven, Alting – Van Plettenberg, 18/10/1782, pp.47-8.

¹²⁹ Johnstone's force consisted of one 74, one 64, three 50's and smaller vessels, while De Suffren had two 74's and three 64's. Both also had smaller warships. See A.T. Mahan, *The Major Operations of the Nations in the War of American Independence*, pp.236-8.

¹³⁰ Anonymous Pamphlet, *A Letter to Lord Viscount Howe, First Lord of the Admiralty on the Subject of a Late Determination, at the Cock-pit in a Prize Cause*, p.35.

¹³¹ NAUK ADM52/2506, Logbook of the *HMS Romney*, for the period 24/7/1780 to 23/7/1781, see 21/7/1781.

¹³² NAUK ADM51/4313, Captain's log, *HMS Romney*, 21/7/1781.

¹³³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Relaas gegeven ... door de Schippers der in de Saldanhabaaij geleegeen hebbende Chinase en Bengaalse Retour Scheepen, 2/8/1781, pp.111-3.

¹³⁴ Wagenaar, J., *Vaderlandsche Historie*, III, VI, 27, p.282.

Dagregister at the Cape stated that the heavy cloud ("swerk") of the early morning soon disappeared.¹³⁵

The leading British ships of the line purposefully sailed straight to the Dutch ships in an effort to capture them before the Dutch had time to damage or destroy them. Before 12:00 three British warships, with the *Romney* in the van, had already reached the VOC ships.¹³⁶ The Captains of the *Hoogcarspel*, *Honcoop*, *Middelburg*, *Paarl* and *Dankbaarheijd* realised that they could not defend their ships against Johnstone's heavy warships, as they were much lighter armed and many members of their crews were ashore (ostensibly to get provisions). Those onboard the East Indiamen chopped off the anchor cables, hoisted the foretopsails (left onboard to beach the ships) and some of the ships were set alight.¹³⁷ The Dutch offered no resistance and the Commodore, Harmeyjer, set the example by fleeing from his ship without firing a shot, 30 minutes after he received the message that the British were coming. He also did not set his own ship alight and when asked why his masts were not nicked (incised), he simply answered: "de tyd was te kort".¹³⁸ Too little time – yet he was in Saldanha Bay for more than two months!

The British anchored nearby, and to prevent the VOC ships from beaching and being gutted by fire, they immediately lowered boats to board and take possession of the Dutch ships.¹³⁹ As the British also fired a few salvos at the Dutch, it increased the tempo of those fleeing. According to Cloete in the chaos that ensued, three crewmembers of the *Middelburg* were shot and killed by the British.¹⁴⁰ Those that set the ships alight arrived ashore at about 12:00¹⁴¹ and the Dutch sailors fled to Cape Town.

The British were able to quickly extinguish all the fires, except on the *Middelburg* whose Captain, Justinus van Gennep, took his orders seriously and made sure that he destroyed his ship.¹⁴² He had prepared adequate flammable material and positioned it throughout his ship. Abraham de Smidt (*Middelburg's* first officer) and two sailors stayed on board and fuelled the

¹³⁵ Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781, Dagregister, 21/7/1781, p.258.

¹³⁶ Anonymous Pamphlet, *A Letter to Lord Viscount Howe, First Lord of the Admiralty on the Subject of a Late Determination, at the Cock-pit in a Prize Cause*, pp.37-8.

¹³⁷ Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781, Relas gegeven ... door de Schippers, 2/8/1781, pp.111-3.

¹³⁸ CA CJ416. Criminele Proces Stukken, G. Harmeyjer, 6/12/1781, pp.635-6.

¹³⁹ Anonymous Pamphlet, *A Letter to Lord Viscount Howe, First Lord of the Admiralty on the Subject of a Late Determination, at the Cock-pit in a Prize Cause*, pp.37-8.

¹⁴⁰ G.J. Schutte, *Briefwisseling van Hendrik Swellengrebel*, Caabsche Nouvelles van't Jaar 1781, Cloete – Swellengrebel (undated and unsigned) p.187.

¹⁴¹ Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781, Relas gegeven ... door de Schippers, 2/8/1781, pp.111-3.

¹⁴² NAUK ADM52/2506, Logbook of the *HMS Romney*, for the period 24/7/1780 to 23/7/1781, see 21/7/1781.

fires until the British were within gunshot. By the time they left, the fires had engulfed the lower decks of the *Middelburg*, burned fiercely and were spreading throughout the ship.¹⁴³

The burning *Middelburg* became extremely hazardous; melting metal was pouring down from her and she posed a grave danger to the other ships as she could ignite them or blow-up at any time. Johnstone boarded one of the ships' boats personally, had a hawser attached to *Middelburg*, and "towed the ship on fire clear away".¹⁴⁴ According to popular myth (and all the historians since, it seems) she blew up ten minutes after the boats left her. In reality however, she burned through the night and at 5:00 on 22 July, when the fire reached her magazine she violently exploded, sending much burning wood and debris through the air.¹⁴⁵

When the British sailed into the bay, the *Diana* and *Royal Charlotte* went to Baviaans Bay (the present North Bay) and put 200 grenadiers under Major Hutchinson ashore. They found the battery close to Hoedjiespunt deserted, put it out of action and then marched to the northern side of the Hoedjies Bay where the Dutch tents and refreshment post were, but by the time they reached it, the crews had already left.¹⁴⁶ In the meantime the *Pondicherry* and *Resolution* sailed to Riet Bay, anchored at 13:00 and put an officer and 20 men ashore. Stofberg, however, had burned and evacuated the post house as he was ordered.¹⁴⁷ On the farm Geelbeksfontein, belonging to one Heufke, Stofberg also set seven buildings alight and destroyed all the wheat. Le Vaillant considered it completely unnecessary, yet, it had to be done in accordance with the orders from the Council of Policy.¹⁴⁸

The *Zon* and *Snelheid* were summarily abandoned. Captain Pietersz of the *Snelheid* did nothing to prevent his ship from falling into British hands, even though he had the sails of the VOC ships onboard and held an important key. He did not attempted to destroy his ship, but simply ordered his seaman's chest to be put into a ships' boat and departed with the crew.¹⁴⁹ The British removed all the sails from the *Snelheid* and though the two hookers were not captured, they were damaged beyond repair and had to be scrapped.

With their large crews and many soldiers onboard, the British experienced supply shortages and Saldanha Bay offered very little to alleviate the situation. On 24 July they took in

¹⁴³ *Kaapse Argiefstukken, 1781*, Resolutiën, 3/8/ 1781, pp.110-4.

¹⁴⁴ NAUK ADM52/2343, Masters Log of the Proceedings of His Majesty's Ship *Hero*, for the period 1/11/1780 to 8/6/1784, see 22/6/1781.

¹⁴⁵ NAUK ADM52/2506, Logbook of the *HMS Romney*, 24/7/1780 to 23/7/1781, see 22/7/1781.

¹⁴⁶ See the Map, Plan of the Bay of Saldanha drawn by the Captain of the *Lark*, Lieutenant D'Auvergne; and Anonymous Pamphlet, *A Letter to Lord Viscount Howe*, pp. 34-5.

¹⁴⁷ CA M1/951, Plan van de Saldanha, 1786, waar op aangetoond werd de Expeditie van den Admiral Johnstone in 1781.

¹⁴⁸ D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, p.465

¹⁴⁹ CA CJ417, Criminele Proces Stukken, R. Pieterz, 10/9/1781, pp.195-204 and 15/9/1781, p.246.

water from some of the captured ships, while the rations onboard some of their ships had to be cut by a third.¹⁵⁰ On 24 July, a cloudy day with rain, the fleet weighed anchor and hove-to. Early the next morning they sailed out in a north-westerly direction.¹⁵¹ Johnstone despatched most of his squadron (and the best warships) to India, placing them under the command of Captain Alms. With one warship, three support ships and the Dutch prizes he sailed to St Helena and returned to England. Cloete thought they were probably in a haste to get out of Saldanha Bay as they feared they might be bottled-up by De Suffren and his five ships of the line.¹⁵²

The Cape received the shocking news that British warships were in Saldanha Bay on Sunday 22 July and a general call-up was signalled on 23 July as they feared a British attack. Simon's Bay reported two ships at sea to the south of False Bay and that night rumours abounded about approaching ships. The anxious defenders of the Cape prepared for a possible night attack and it was only after the lookouts reported the next morning that no ships were approaching, that calm returned.¹⁵³

Cloete wrote that old and young were eager to defend the Cape against the British and arrived at the Cape from near and far.¹⁵⁴ As a large number of militiamen from the surrounding area were in Cape Town a revue parade was held on 25 July. The parade consisted of the *Corps Pennisten*, the Cape Town burgher militia (two cavalry and four infantry companies), one reserve company, the *Invalides* (one company), four dragoon companies and one infantry company from Stellenbosch, two French regiments, one company French artillerists and the VOC Garrison.¹⁵⁵

News of the events in Saldanha Bay ("het Smertelijk berigt") arrived at the Cape on 24 July. As they were not aware of the British whereabouts, a group of volunteers from the burgher cavalry under the command of Lieutenant Van Reenen was sent to Saldanha Bay to gain intelligence.¹⁵⁶ Van Reenen departed on the afternoon of 25 July and met sailors from Saldanha Bay that informed him that the British had already left. Van Reenen returned to the Cape. The next day it was rumoured that the British were still in Saldanha Bay and Van Reenen and his

¹⁵⁰ NAUK ADM52/2506, Logbook of *HMS Romney*, for the period 24/7/1780 to 23/7/1781, see 24/7/1781.

¹⁵¹ NAUK ADM52/2506, Master's Log, *HMS Romney*, 25/7/1781.

¹⁵² *Briefwisseling van Hendrik Swellengrebel*, Caabsche Nouvelles van't Jaar 1781, Cloete – Swellengrebel (undated and unsigned) p.187.

¹⁵³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister 22/7/1781 and 23/7/1781, pp.258-9.

¹⁵⁴ *Briefwisseling van Hendrik Swellengrebel*, Caabsche Nouvelles van't Jaar 1781, Cloete – Swellengrebel (undated and unsigned), p.188.

¹⁵⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister 25/7/1781, pp.259-60.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

men left for Saldanha Bay again, while the Captains of the captured VOC ships arrived at the Cape. On 30 July a report from Van Reenen's arrived, stating that they saw no VOC ships or British ships in Saldanha Bay.¹⁵⁷ At the same time a ship was seen cruising off the Cape and as a strong west-north-westerly wind blew, the Cape expected to have an enemy fleet at their doorstep by sunrise the next morning. Another anxious night in anticipation of a possible night attack followed. Things only settled down after the lookout on Lion's Head reported no sails the next morning and news arrived that a Danish ship had sailed into False Bay.¹⁵⁸

The militia performed their duties well and stayed at their positions. The problem was that the Cape had no way of knowing if the British had picked up reinforcements at St Helena, while they feared that the British could still land in False Bay or Hout Bay and march to the Cape. To counter this, a series of traverses and small batteries armed with small guns were erected along the roads linking these locations with the Cape.¹⁵⁹ By the end of July, north-westerly gales blew, which would make it very difficult for sailing ships to linger around, and in early August it was thought that the British were no longer in the area and that the threat had diminished. The Council of Policy emphasised on 3 August that with the French troops and the prospect of mobilising the militia, the Cape was quite capable of defending itself. It was decided to demobilise the militia from the districts on 10 August, so that they can continue with their agricultural responsibilities. The Governor was pleasantly surprised by their willingness to serve and the French Commander at the Cape, De Conway, also had much praise for them.¹⁶⁰

Why did the French warships anchored in Simon's Bay not act when news of the presence of a British fleet arrived? When De Suffren arrived at the Cape his ships had to be replenished and needed urgent repairs, since they did not only sail non-stop from France, but also fought a naval battle. The Cape had to provide the necessary gear to the squadron and masts and spars (of which there was a shortage) to *L'Hannibal*.¹⁶¹ On 5 July *L'Artesian* had to sail to Table Bay to collect stores and equipment and she returned to Simon's Bay on 20 July.¹⁶² Brandt reported on 23 July that four of the French ships would be ready for sea in about two days, but that *L'Hannibal* would take at least four to five days to be ready. De Suffren did make plans to pursue the British, but he was delayed because *L'Hannibal's* masts were not yet rigged

¹⁵⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister 30/7/1781, p.262.

¹⁵⁸ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister 30/7/1781 and 30/7/1781, pp.262-3.

¹⁵⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Uitgaande Brieven, Van Plettenberg – *Heeren XVII*, 22/8/1781, pp.417-8.

¹⁶⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 3/8/1781 and Uitgaande Brieven, Van Plettenberg – *Heeren XVII*, 22/8/1781, pp.110 and 417-8.

¹⁶¹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Uitgaande Brieven, Van Plettenberg – *Heeren XVII*, 22/8/1781, p.419.

and the British did not stay long enough.¹⁶³ When it was rumoured early in August that British frigates were cruising around the Cape, De Suffren stated that as soon as the wind and weather permitted he would sail out to either capture or chase away the British frigates.¹⁶⁴ However, there was no further evidence of the presence of British warships.

On 22 July the Council of Policy warned the Captains of the VOC ships in Hout Bay (*Morgenster*, *Amsterdam*, *Indiaan* and *Batavia*) to prepare for an enemy attack. They had to be vigilant and put up a stern defence if the British appeared. The next day the Captains complained that their ships and crews were weak and not capable of repulsing a strong enemy.¹⁶⁵ On the same day the Council appointed the Captain of the *Morgenster* as Commodore and ordered them to sail to Table Bay under French flags (a sailing distance of about 14 nautical miles or 25 kilometres). They had to stay close inshore and if they met an enemy they could not outsail, they had to beach their ships and set them alight.¹⁶⁶ The ships did not move. After the news about the Saldanha Bay disaster arrived on 24 July, Van Plettenberg again instructed them to immediately sail to Table Bay, but was notified two days later that the crews apparently met and objected to sailing, as their ships were too poorly armed and manned to defend them against an enemy. The commanders of the ships agreed and stated that as some guns were mounted in a battery ashore they would defend the defence from it. They were then ordered to defend the bay with the battery (“deselve Batterije tot het uiterste te defendeeren”) and to place a reliable officer and some men on each ship to set them alight if the enemy appeared. In the meantime the *Jagtrust* was also ordered to return to the Cape, but, as sails were seen off Hout Bay, her crew also refused. Due to the lack of courage amongst the Dutch seamen, the French eventually despatched warships to escort the VOC ships from Hout Bay to Table Bay.¹⁶⁷

The Captains of the captured VOC ships arrived at the Castle on 26 July.¹⁶⁸ In their report they tried to exonerate themselves from blame. They emphasised that when they became aware of the presence of an enemy, sixteen British ships were already in the Bay and

¹⁶² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister 5/7/1781 and 20/7/1781, pp.255 and 257-8.

¹⁶³ *Briefwisseling van Hendrik Swellengrebel*, *Caabsche Nouvelles van't Jaar 1781*, Cloete – Swellengrebel (undated and unsigned), p.187.

¹⁶⁴ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, *Inkomende Brieven*, Brandt – Van Plettenberg, 23/7/1781 and *Resolutiën*, 3/8/1781, pp.114 and 325.

¹⁶⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister, 22/7/1781 and 23/7/1781, pp.258-9.

¹⁶⁶ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, *Resolutiën*, 23/7/1781, pp.107-8.

¹⁶⁷ For the whole saga see *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, *Resolutiën*, 26/7/1781 and 3/8/1781; and Dagregister, 24/7/1781, 26/7/1781, 3/8/1781, pp.109-11 and 259-64. See also CA C1776, *Uitgaande Brieven*, Van Plettenberg – “Goede vrienden”, 26/7/1781, pp.118-21; and C1777, *Uitgaande Brieven*, Van Plettenberg – “Goede Vriend”, 3/8/1781, pp.2-3.

as the ships of the line were in front, they realised it was impossible to resist. The British immediately had boats in the water, while they cut their cables and set their ships alight, and then fired at them as they retreated. One ship burned completely, but they did not mention which ship it was, creating the impression that it could be any of the ships.¹⁶⁹ The Council knew that it was the *Middelburg* and Independent Fiscal Boers had to investigate the conduct of the Captains to establish if they executed their orders.¹⁷⁰ If they contravened their orders, they would have to answer to the Council of Justice. Boers reported that some of the Captains only partially followed their orders, while others completely disobeyed them. Van Gennep of the *Middelburg* acted in accordance with the orders and was exonerated. The Council of Policy lamented that Harmeyer did not do his duty, the hooker *Snelheijd* with all the sails was not set alight and the masts of the ships were not incised.¹⁷¹ The VOC later relieved the guilty Captains of their duties. The Saldanha Bay and Hout Bay episodes, with VOC officials not prepared to defend VOC property, is a good illustration of the decline in the VOC. Not only were its possessions poorly defended, but its personnel had lost the diligence and commitment of an earlier age.

The loss of the richly laden ships was a severe financial blow to the decaying VOC and Van Plettenberg was well aware of it. In a letter to the *Heeren XVII* he downplayed the events in Saldanha Bay and emphasised that they did their utmost to defend the Cape, while the reaction of the militia was excellent: “Wij hebben voorts momentlijk op het bekoomen berigt van ‘s Vijands Verschijning in de Saldanhabaaij op nieuw door een general opontbod alle de Landmilitie doen opkoomen dewelke dan ook Successivelijk met de uijtersten Spoed alhier verscheenen ... tot een Vigoreuse resistentie ...”. He then stated that after the British departed from Saldanha Bay, they feared a British attack and maintained a proper defence of the Cape: “... berigt van derselver Vertrek uijt de Saldanhabaaij, egter dag en nagt in Voorsz. Positie is gebleeven ... een attacque op deese plaats t’onderneem ... ingevalle deselve zouden hebben willen tenteeren in de Baaij Fals of Hout Baaij te landen, en van daar ditheen te marcheeren...”.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister, 26/7/1781, p.261.

¹⁶⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Relas gegeven ... door de Schippers, 2/8/1781, pp.111-3.

¹⁷⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 3/8/1781 in Jeffreys, 1781, p.113.

¹⁷¹ See the report of the Independent Fiscal, W.C. Boers to the Council of Policy on the conduct of the VOC captains and their men at Saldanha Bay, in *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 9/10/1781, pp.141-4.

¹⁷² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Uitgaande Brieven, Van Plettenberg – *Heeren XVII*, 22/8/1781, pp.417-8.

The Saldanha Bay incident was a disgrace to the Cape authorities, as they were severely criticised for the way in which they handled the whole affair. In a letter to Van Plettenberg dated 2 November 1781 (delivered to the Cape by a Swedish vessel on 6 May 1782) the *Heeren XVII* stated that when they learned about the loss of their ships through a Dutch newspaper on 22 October, they could not believe it, as they thought Saldanha Bay was protected by a battery and the crews would at least put up a fight. Van Plettenberg was reprimanded for not unshipping the complete cargoes (“om welke reeden die bodems niet geheel ontladen”) and they wished to know why the sails of the ships were not taken back to the Cape, why Saldanha Bay was not properly defended, why the ships were not set alight and why were they not sailed to False Bay after the arrival of De Suffren? Van Plettenberg was told in no uncertain terms that future orders regarding the handling of VOC ships, “door UE niet te min behoorlyk zullen moeten worden nagevolgt”.¹⁷³

Not only did the captured ships carry valuable cargoes, but also currency for Ceylon. The anger of the *Heeren XVII* about the Saldanha Bay fiasco is therefore evident in many letters and extracts of meetings that arrived at the Cape and they did not hesitate to apportion blame to Van Plettenberg. In a letter dated 8 December 1781, they expressed their surprise at the decisions made at the Cape and though the whole matter were under investigation, they asked Van Plettenberg why the location of gun batteries was not inspected before the ships went to Saldanha Bay and why did the ships not anchor at the designated location?¹⁷⁴ In a very stern letter (written in December 1782) the *Heeren XVII* stated that from advertisements in London newspapers on the cargo of the *Hoogcarspel*, it was evident that the most valuable items were not unshipped at the Cape. Van Plettenberg had to explain why this happened, as the ships were supposed to sail to Saldanha Bay with ballast only. His planning was insufficient and superficial, “zelfs een misdaad”, and they were extremely disconcerted about the fortifications, the incorrect anchorage and the hooker *Snelheijd* that should have gone back to the Cape with the sails. The Captains did not follow their orders to create a barrier with spars and when faced by superior force they should have at least prevented an enemy from sailing off with the valuable cargoes.¹⁷⁵ Condemnation from the VOC Council in Canton also followed as they were

¹⁷³ CA C639, Inkomende Secreete Brieven, De Gecommitteerde Bewindhebbers en gevolmagtigden van de vergadering van 17 tot de Secreete Zaken – Van Plettenberg, 2/11/1781, pp.26-8.

¹⁷⁴ CA C553 Inkomende Brieven, *Heeren XVII* – Van Plettenberg, 8/12/1781, pp.80-1.

¹⁷⁵ See CA C555 Inkomende Brieven, *Heeren XVII* – Van Plettenberg, 7/12/1782, pp.110.

perturbed about the fact that their ships (China ships) were dispatched to an unprotected harbour and kept there despite the arrival of a French fleet in False Bay.¹⁷⁶

The Cape only received news about the loss of *Held Woltemade* from Ceylon in 1782. It was one of the most serious events of the war as she carried much money and it was made even more grievous (“beklaaglijker”) because it caused the loss of the return ships. The High Council of the Indies was certain that orders were not properly followed and even stated that a case of “pligt versuim” existed.¹⁷⁷ It was a severe financial blow to the VOC and correspondence about the Saldanha Bay affair between the Cape and the *Heeren XVII* continued to November 1785.¹⁷⁸

The British victors also did not have it their own way. The prize money from the capture of the richly laden Dutch ships were substantial and the Army appealed to the War Office to share it with the Navy as their orders stated they would share in the booty. Lists were compiled and Major-General Medows was to receive the vast sum of £18148, while the prize money for common soldiers was only £15.¹⁷⁹ A great squabble then developed as the Navy was apparently unwilling to give the Army a share of the prize money. According to an anonymous pamphlet published in 1787, a court decided it had to be shared, Sandwich insisted that it belonged to the Navy and appealed against the ruling. Eventually, a very unusual outcome for such affairs, the prize money went to the Crown.¹⁸⁰ So, nobody seemed to have won from the Saldanha Bay disaster, except King George!

6. THE MARITIME DIMENSION OF THE REST OF THE WAR

6.1. The Navies of the Belligerents and the War in the East

As the Fourth Anglo-Dutch war was a trade war, it was essentially fought at sea. The belligerents used familiar tools like navies and maritime power projection to focus on damaging their enemy's trade, while expanding own trade and establishing sea power. By 1781 Britain knew it was impossible to permanently regain her American colonies and the “principal object” of

¹⁷⁶ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Inkomende Brieven, Directeur en Raad te Canton – Governor and Secunde, 2/1/1783, p.368-9.

¹⁷⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Inkomende Brieven, Goeverneur Generaal en Raad – Council of Policy, 18/10/1782, p.354.

¹⁷⁸ See CA C562, Inkomende Brieven, *Heeren XVII* – C. van de Graaff, 23/11/1785, pp.186-191.

¹⁷⁹ NAUK WO164/480, Saldanha Prize Lists 1781.

¹⁸⁰ Anonymous Pamphlet, *A Letter to Lord Viscount Howe, First Lord of the Admiralty on the subject of a late determination, at the cock-pit in a prize cause*, pp.11-20.

the war became “to distress” her enemies (mainly France), to secure British possessions “against any hostile attempts” and to bring superior force to bear on the overseas territories and commerce of her enemies.¹⁸¹ This depended on establishing British superiority at sea; as Admiral Anson pointed out two decades earlier, general superiority was not possible as it implied weakness everywhere, yet what was possible and necessary, was to concentrate on the vital areas. Now, one of the “vital areas” for Britain was to damage enemy commerce and to try to keep her enemies weak in the far-off seas.

Britain carried out a substantial naval shipbuilding programme and three 74-gunned ships of the line were even constructed at the expense of the EEIC. Though merchantmen had to pay levies for naval escorts, this is indicative of the interaction between commerce and the Navy as well as of the perceived value of the Royal Navy in protecting British global trade.¹⁸² In April 1782 the situation in the Atlantic changed, after a British fleet under Admiral Rodney won a great naval victory over the French fleet commanded by Admiral De Grasse at the Battle of the Saints. As stated, it was too late to salvage the British hold on her North American colonies, yet British naval success in the Atlantic made a bigger concentration in the East possible.

The Fourth Anglo-Dutch War clearly illustrated the weakness of the Dutch naval establishment as the Stadtholder, Willem V, was unable to act decisively enough to improve the situation. In October 1782 he created a secret advisory body, called the *Departement der Marine*, consisting of a number of senior officials and officers. Unfortunately a plan to combine the five Admiralties into a single Admiralty failed, but centralised naval planning was improved.¹⁸³ The various Admiralties were engaged in vital building programmes: By 1783 the Maaze were building 12 new warships (to bring their total to about 50 ships), Amsterdam was building 25 new ships (which meant they would have more than 50 ships operational), while Friesland was building four new ships. To the Republic one of the most important functions of these ships was to escort the VOC return fleet and protect trade.¹⁸⁴

The Dutch and the British fought no major battles, however on 5 August 1781 a Dutch squadron under Rear-Admiral Johan Zoutman, crossed paths with the British convoy of Vice-Admiral Hyde Parker at the Dogger Bank. Though the fleets were close to equal in numbers (six

¹⁸¹ H.W. Richmond, *The Navy in India 1763-1783*, pp.119-21.

¹⁸² *Private Papers of John, Earl of Sandwich*, III, Secret Committee EEIC – Sandwich, p.30.

¹⁸³ L. Eekhout, *Het Admiralenboek. De vlagofficieren van de Nederlandse marine*, p.26.

¹⁸⁴ IMH J.H. van Kinsbergen, *Zeemans hand-boek: zynde eene memorie : over de middelen ter uitvoering van het advys den 28ste Maart 1783 uitgebragt, om een vaste Post op den Staat van Oorlog te brengen : tot eenejaarlyksche Equipagie*, Part one, third section, p.13.

ships of the line and six frigates),¹⁸⁵ the Dutch had fewer men and smaller guns. During the fierce battle that followed both fleets took a heavy beating, literally fighting each other to a standstill. As Vice Admiral Hyde Parker wrote, "by this time, our ships were unmanageable".¹⁸⁶ The Dutch celebrated a victory, even though there was no real decision and no great strategic spin-offs.

Dutch sea power was direly needed in the Indies, but such support would take some time, and to project power to the East was difficult. It was far, the voyage was long and dangerous and by the time fleets reached their objective, they have often lost much of their strength. For example, it took British reinforcements under Admiral Bickerton seven months to reach Bombay. De Suffren sailed in March and only reached the coast of India in November. Convoys with warships and troopships required well located bases along the route, that were equally spaced, well-defended and with adequate supplies and repair facilities. Until the Dutch became involved in the war, neither France nor Britain had such a base on the route to the East. The French then had the Cape and Mauritius, which were valuable to her maritime communications. In contrast the British only had St Helena Island between Britain and India and they had to rely on the benevolence of neutral Portugal with its Atlantic islands and Brazilian ports. However, neutrality did not necessarily provide protection – as the events at Porto Praya illustrated.¹⁸⁷

By late 1781 the directors of the EEIC were very worried about the safety of both their ships and St Helena Island since an enemy was "in possession of the Cape" and they warned if De Suffren had stopped at St Helena, he would have captured 18 merchantmen and the *HMS Renown* (50). St Helena had insufficient supplies and relied on the Cape in peacetime. The EEIC frequently requested the British Government (twice in October 1781 alone) to capture the Cape. Enemy warships at such a strategically location was extremely threatening to the trade with the East, in fact Lord Hillsborough was told, India "will be hazarded, and in extreme danger if the Dutch and French are permitted to hold possession of the Cape of Good Hope".¹⁸⁸ Plans were underway to despatch 5000 troops and warships as reinforcements to India (Bickerton's expedition), and the EEIC asked the Government to use this force to capture the Cape, since the power that held the Cape had "the key to the East Indies; it is the Gibraltar of India". Also, control of the Cape made it possible to keep track of the French Navy and with a strong naval squadron at the Cape, it was possible "to protect the Cape from any force that may be sent

¹⁸⁵ J. R. Bruijn, *The Dutch Navy of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, p.157.

¹⁸⁶ G.R. Barnes and J.H. Owen (eds), *The Private Papers of John, Earl of Sandwich*, pp.19-20.

¹⁸⁷ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of sea power upon history*, pp.520-1.

against it".¹⁸⁹ When they gained secret intelligence that France was despatching a large force under De Bussy to the East, it gave new impetus to a second expedition to the Cape. It was discussed at length, but it is uncertain why nothing came of it – perhaps Hillsborough thought that the French would again arrive at the Cape before them.

The British decision to send Sir Richard Bickerton's expedition to the East was made in October 1781, but the expedition only sailed on 6 February 1782 with six ships of the line, support ships and 4000 troops. In a letter written in December 1781 (received at the Cape on 23 March 1782), Van de Perre and Boers warned Van Plettenberg that a substantial military force under the command of Bickerton (eight warships, sixteen East Indiamen and 5000-6000 troops) were on its way to the East.¹⁹⁰ The defenders of the Cape considered this a threat and it was rumoured that Bickerton's expedition had orders to capture the Cape. The Comte De Bussy arrived at the Cape in April, while the French reinforcements (under his command) destined to India and escorted by six ships of the line with more than 3000 troops onboard, only arrived in May 1782. De Bussy, who was the dashing young comrade of the great Dupleix (former French Governor-General in India) a few decades earlier, was now a gouty invalid of sixty-four and not the type of commander that could regain French eminence in India. Nonetheless, with a British threat looming, De Bussy felt compelled to leave 600 men to reinforce the Cape. It was generally accepted at the Cape that the presence of the French warships and soldiers again dissuaded the British from attacking the Cape. When one of De Bussy's commanders, the Chevalier de Peynier visited the Cape in November 1785, Van de Graaff thanked him for saving the Cape during the war. As he had no substantial means of thanking the gallant Chevalier, Van de Graaff presented him with the best products of the Cape ("beste Producten van dit Land"): Constantia white and red wine (about 150 litres of each) and four vats of Steen wine!¹⁹¹

In the meantime the war in the East was not favourable to the Dutch. The British had grabbed the opportunity to capture the very important VOC possession Trincomalee on Ceylon, as well as Tutacorin, Negapatnam, Bengal, Padang and a number of forts on the west coast of Sumatra.¹⁹² The VOC were in a bad state and if French assistance or reinforcements from the

¹⁸⁸ L.C.F. Turner, *The Cape of Good Hope and the Trafalgar Campaign*, pp.104-9.

¹⁸⁹ H.W. Richmond, *The Navy in India 1763-1783*, pp.414-5 and 418.

¹⁹⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, *Inkomende Secreete Brieven*, Van de Perre and Boers – Van Plettenberg, 15/12/1781, p.220.

¹⁹¹ C169, *Resolutiën*, 29/11/1785, pp.302-331, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁹² G. Teitler, 'De Marine en de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.60; and W.E.H. Lecky, *History of England*, V, p.80.

Dutch State were not forthcoming, things looked pretty bleak. As help from the Netherlands would not materialise, things were in De Suffren's hands.

De Suffren reached Mauritius on 25 October and after the death of the French naval commander in the Indian Ocean, Comte d'Orves, the energetic De Suffren took command. He departed from Mauritius with a substantial force consisted of 10 ships of the line (four 74's and six 64's), eight other warships (one fourth rater, four frigates, two corvettes and a brig) and 3101 troops.¹⁹³ After leaving Mauritius, they captured the *HMS Hannibal* (50) on its way to Madras.

Hughes had a strong force (nine ships of the line) in Indian waters and the advantage of operating from a good and well protected base (Madras). As he wished to retain Trincomalee (recently captured from the VOC) with its first-rate natural harbour, and the other possessions the British captured, the scene was set for tough naval combat. De Suffren and Hughes were to meet in five hard-fought engagements. De Suffren was tactically the more innovative, for example in their second battle (on 12 April 1782) he put his tactical theory of concentrating superior firepower at a portion of the enemy's line of battle while holding back the rest, into practice. He did not obtain a clear tactical victory, but two ships in the British centre were severely damaged.¹⁹⁴

The French position in India was weak, they had lost Pondicherry and their main hope was their Indian ally Haider Ali, a sworn enemy of the British. After France's allies reoccupied Pondicherry, De Suffren could at least withdraw to it. When De Suffren tried to recapture the VOC post Negapatnam, Hughes put his squadron between Suffren and his objective. Another bitter battle followed with high casualties, severe damage – again indecisive. De Suffren then supported Haider Ali in recapturing Cuddalore in April 1782 and recaptured Trincomalee in July 1782.¹⁹⁵ As the British defence of Trincomalee rested on the Royal Navy, De Suffren retook it while Hughes replenished and repaired his tired ships at Madras. Hughes arrived two days too late, yet De Suffren was ready to do battle. The French performed well, but due to a lack of enthusiasm amongst some of his Captains, De Suffren was robbed of a great victory. He afterward sent four of his Captains back to Mauritius. With Trincomalee recaptured and the co-operation between De Suffren and Haider Ali, British possessions on the Coromandel Coast and Bengal were in jeopardy until the arrival of Bickerton's reinforcements.¹⁹⁶ Things then changed

¹⁹³ NAN De JongeXL34, *Journal de la Campagne de Monsieur Suffren dans les Indes Orientales* (no date).

¹⁹⁴ O. Warner, *Great Sea Battles*, pp.124-6.

¹⁹⁵ IMH Milo 163, *Geschiedenis van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, betreffende een opgave en beschrijving van 13 belangrijke zeeslagen, 1595-1799*, p.56.

¹⁹⁶ H.W. Richmond, *Statesmen and Sea Power*, p.155.

and though De Bussy had also arrived, the French position ashore was difficult. In the final action between Hughes and De Suffren in June 1783, the British had superior numbers (three more warships), yet De Suffren's naval force saved Cuddalore, as he drove the British naval forces that besieged it off.¹⁹⁷

In his campaign against Hughes, De Suffren seriously impeded British operations. Though their battles essentially ended in virtual draws, it was an important achievement for the French Navy against the British and there was often much strategic gain to the French. De Suffren was an aggressive and successful naval commander, in comparison with his French and Dutch colleagues. He was one of the few really capable French naval commanders of the late eighteenth century, he had a clear grasp of naval strategy and appreciated the importance of strategic locations in the age of sail. De Suffren did not win a great empire in the East, yet, through his wise application of sea power, he certainly arrested further British conquests in this war theatre and he even restored Dutch possessions. This is contrary to the opinion of some British naval historians. Harding for example, is ambivalent about De Suffren's success, stating that his reputation "is still open to question" as sea power "played a far lesser role in the East Indies than in the Americas".¹⁹⁸ It might be so, but despite having commanders inferior in ship handling and fighting, De Suffren's naval campaign undoubtedly achieved much.

So, did the naval war in the East prove the politicians, soldiers and sailors correct in emphasising the strategic value of the Cape? An aspect about which there could be no doubt is that the French position in the Indian Ocean would have been very difficult, if not untenable, without the Cape. For Britain and France the defence of the East started at the Cape, since the Cape was valuable to both and their only bases in the southern oceans (Mauritius and St Helena Island) relied on the Cape. French maritime power projection to India and their position in Mauritius would have been very difficult without the Cape. In defending the Cape De Suffren knew that if he could stop his enemy at sea, they would not have to fight on land. Furthermore, French frigates were superior to the British frigates in the East and French cruisers posed a great danger to the EEIC convoys.¹⁹⁹ This is a lesson the British direly learnt.

Would Hughes have done better if the Cape was in British hands? Perhaps not; however, as the French had the benefit of the Cape the British war against France was so much tougher. If the British took the Cape in 1781, De Suffren would not have been such a threat in the East in 1782-83 and it would not have been necessary to despatch Bickerton's

¹⁹⁷ O. Warner, *Great Sea Battles*, pp.127-30.

¹⁹⁸ See R. Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare*, pp.249-50.

¹⁹⁹ NMM SAN/F/29/62, Wolseley – Sandwich, 1/12/1781.

reinforcements in 1782.²⁰⁰ After the British captured Trincomalee, it had to be defended by the Royal Navy and De Suffren recaptured it, the moment Hughes turned his back. Hughes was unable to capture Trincomalee for a second time – De Suffren prevented it with his warships.

British administrators knew that the security of their Indian colonial conquests depended on sea power, as Cornwallis, a soldier, wrote in 1783, “unless we have a fleet capable of looking the enemy in the face, we must not hazard a considerable body of troops”.²⁰¹ The lesson was clear: the first line of defence against maritime power projection was a navy capable of stopping an enemy at sea.

6.2. VOC Maritime Defence and Assistance from the Dutch State

During 1781 the Committee for Secret Affairs reminded the Governor-General, all the Captains of ships and all the Governors, that the safety of the VOC ships was crucial. As British privateers had captured a number of VOC ships, they had to make sure that all ships were properly armed and capable of defending themselves. Return ships should have naval escorts, while ships carrying troops to the Cape and the East would be escorted by the French Navy. France would also provide warships to assist with the defence of the Cape.²⁰²

Without the French, the Cape had no maritime defence of its own. The *Postiljon* occasionally cruised around the coast to report on ship movements or to visit some of the bays. For the rest of the time, she was stationed at Mossel Bay (from July 1781 to November 1782) and kept ready to immediately sail for Batavia if the British attacked the Cape, or to the Netherlands if news arrived that the British had taken Batavia.²⁰³ As she was too lightly armed and had no coastal defence ability or could not interdict passing ships, the *Postiljon* could only report or watch.

The VOC realised that carrying goods under its own flag was a great risk. The Committee for Secret Affairs suggested to the *Heeren XVII* in July 1781 and again in April 1782 that they must consider selling some of their ships to neutral states like Denmark, Sweden, Prussia, Russia and Hamburg. These ships could carry the flags of the above countries, but be controlled by the VOC and conduct its trade with the East.²⁰⁴ The VOC realised it was not

²⁰⁰ H.W. Richmond, *The Navy in India 1763-1783*, p.126.

²⁰¹ J. Black, *Warfare in the Eighteenth Century*, p.144.

²⁰² NAN VOC4538, Geheim Committee – Gouverneur Generaal en Raden van Indiën, 5/6/1781 and 23/8/1781.

²⁰³ See CA C162 Resolutiën, 24/3/1782, p.86; and C163 Resolutiën, 16/7/1782, p.64.

²⁰⁴ NAN VOC4536, Rapport van de bewindhebber J. Graafland, 9/7/1781 and 10/4/1782.

possible to rely on French convoys and that neutral ships was an outcome, but their Governors were warned that no freight that could be considered contraband, should be loaded in these so-called neutral ships.²⁰⁵ Consequently many of the Swedish and Prussian ships visiting the Cape, like the *Breslau*, *Berlin* and *Potsdam*, were previously called the *Blok*, *Dordrecht* and *Sparenwijk*.²⁰⁶

The idea of equipping VOC ships for war was part and parcel of the maritime history of the VOC (specifically in the seventeenth century) and it occurred again during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War. In January 1781 the Amsterdam *Kamer* suggested that VOC ships should carry heavier guns, with the biggest ships being armed with four 32-pounders, 24 8-pounders and smaller guns.²⁰⁷ At the same time standing orders were issued to all ships. These orders stipulated the use and storage of small arms, determined the combat stations for the officers and men, while Captains had to inspect guns, ammunition and military equipment on a daily basis.²⁰⁸ It was too dangerous for VOC ships to sail without escorts and the VOC decided in April 1781 to arm ships for escort duties. In August 1781 the *Heeren XVII* decided that they would only send out ships equipped for war, and not cargo ships as considered earlier. The 150 foot (46m) ships was armed with fourteen 18-pounders, 22 12-pounders, two 8-pounders, eight 6-pounders, ten 1-pounders and four ½-pounders, and carried a crew of up to 330. The 140 foot (43m) ships were armed with fourteen 12-pounders, 24 8-pounders, eight 3-4-pounders, eight 1-pounders and four ½-pounders, and had a crew of 300.²⁰⁹ The VOC planned to equip nine ships for war, yet, they rightly doubted if these ships would be able to stand their own against the enemy. Due to a lack of competent officers and sailors it was soon evident that it would be impossible to send the ships out in 1781.²¹⁰ Van Plettenberg was notified about it in August 1781 and told that these ships would fall under the operational control of Ceylon.²¹¹

²⁰⁵ NAN VOC4538, De gecommiteerde bewindhebbers en gemagtigdens tot de Secrete zaken – Gouverneur en Secunde aan Cabo de Goede Hoop, 25/1/1782.

²⁰⁶ F.J.A. Broeze et al, *Maritieme Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, III, pp.284-5.

²⁰⁷ NAN VOC4960, Memorie van A.A. Titsingh, Equipagemeester aan de Bewindhebbers van de Kamer Amsterdam over de Bewapening van de Schepen, 29/1/1781.

²⁰⁸ NAN VOC4966, Reglement voor de huishouding op de gearmeerde scheepen der Oost-Indische Compagnie. (no date, probably 1781).

²⁰⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Inkomende Secreet Brieven, Extract uit de missive van Heeren Bewindhebbers ... extra-ordinaire vergad' e van XVII, 23/8/1781, pp.196-9.

²¹⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Inkomende Brieven, Extract *Heeren XVII* – Goeverneur Generaal en de Raden Van Indien, 23/4/1781 and 8/12/1781; as well as Extract uit die Missive van Heeren Bewindhebbers ..., 28/9/1781, pp.392, 418 and 426.

²¹¹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Inkomende Secreete Brieven, Gecommitteerde Bewindhebbers – Van Plettenberg, 23/8/1781, pp.218-9.

On 24 September 1782 the French corvette *Le Victor* arrived at the Cape. She delivered orders instructing the Cape authorities to prepare to receive two Dutch warships escorting VOC ships to the Cape.²¹² These ships sailed from Texel on 7 July 1782. They were the first VOC ships to sail for the East since 1781, and consisted of seven armed ships (the *Ganges*, *Holland*, *Java*, *Schoonderlo*, *Voorberg*, *de Zeeuw*, *t Zeepaard*) and the East Indiaman *de Bodt*. They were supposed to put to sea in September 1781, but had to spend the long winter at the anchorage off Texel, where the crews received a poor, low vitamin, diet. As a result, the scene was set for a very tragic passage.²¹³

On 2 December 1782 two Dutch naval frigates the *Brunswijk* (40), under the command of Captain Johannes Pruijst, and the *Jason* (36), Captain Jan Sels, arrived at the Cape with the eight VOC ships in company. The first Dutch naval vessels visiting the Cape. Two members of the Council of Policy went onboard to thank the Captains for delivering the convoy safely.²¹⁴ The convoy had a difficult voyage. It lost 1102 men at sea and 915 were hospitalised on arrival.

Casualties on the frigates were high. On the *Jason* 104 died and 80 were sick, while 79 died on the *Brunswijk* and 80 were sick.²¹⁵ The frigates and the VOC ships were in a poor condition ("deplorablen toestand") and required repairs. As the VOC ships were badly provisioned for the voyage, they suffered 919 fatalities and had 756 sick men onboard. The tally of dead and sick were as follows: 172 dead and 72 ill on the *Ganges*, 137 and 97 on the *Holland*, 73 and 102 on *t Zeepaard*, 110 and 129 on the *Voorberg*, 126 and 112 on *de Zeeuw*, 108 and 180 on *de Bodt*, 51 and 80 on the *Schoonderlo* and on the *Java* 142 men died, while 84 were hospitalised at the Cape. Soon, a further 140 men in died in hospital, which increased the fatalities on the VOC ships to 1059.²¹⁶ As the *Bodt* and *Zeeuw* had lost so many sailors, and the few onboard were weak, they required assistance from the shore to move anchors.

Though the Council of Policy hoped that the Dutch frigates would escort the VOC return ships to Europe, the Captains of the frigates had orders to sail to the West Indies.²¹⁷ While the

²¹² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 25/9/1782, pp.244-5.

²¹³ F.S. Gaastra, "Sware continuerende Lasten ..." in G. Knaap and G. Teitler, *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.100.

²¹⁴ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Dagregister, 2/12/1782, pp.368-9.

²¹⁵ These were the numbers as reported by the Council of Policy to the Governor-General and Council of India on 4/12/1782 in *Kaapse Archiefstukken*, I, Uitgaande Brieven, p.529. However the Captains reported to the Dutch naval authorities in 1784 they had 210 (118 and 92 respectively) ill; see NAN 1.01.47.29.124, Generaal Relaaas van Capitaine ter Zee gecommandeert hebben s'Lands fregat d' *Jason* gedurende zyne reize na de Caap de Goede Hoop, Suriname ..., 1782-3 en 1784, 27/7/1784.

²¹⁶ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Goeverneur General en Raad, 3/1/1783, p.435.

²¹⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 17/12/1782, pp.298-9.

Dutch frigates were at the Cape, Brigadier De Conway complained to the Council of Policy that a number of French soldiers had deserted and he was convinced that they were onboard the frigates.²¹⁸ The Captains repeatedly denied having any deserters onboard (on 24 February and 3 March), while they requested the Governor to transfer extra men to their ships as their crew shortages were so severe that it would be difficult to engage enemy ships.²¹⁹ The Council of Policy was also convinced that the deserters were on the frigates, but as the Dutch naval vessels had to sail into a war zone with a severe crew shortage, they agreed on 4 March to provide each ship with 60 additional men.²²⁰

On 7 March Captain Sels notified the Council that he had nineteen deserters on the *Jason*, stating that he was unaware of their presence. The Council stated that they would report the matter to the Netherlands, and had the deserters fetched.²²¹ A few days later (11 March), Captain Pruijst of the *Brunswijk* also reported that unbeknown to him some deserters were onboard his ship and he immediately sent them ashore. The Governor stated that these incidents had broken the innate trust they had in the Navy. Consequently, the guards were ordered to prevent naval officers and senior ratings from frequenting the barracks area to prevent "Officieren van 'S Lands Scheepen ... Verschijdene Perzoonen tot desertie debauchereren...".²²² However, Sels again asked the Governor to provide him with a further twenty men as he had a crew shortage and would have difficulty defending his ship and the honour of the fatherland in a naval battle. His request was declined.²²³ With a fresh south-easterly blowing, the *Brunswijk* and *Jason* left for Curacao on 24 March. Despite the commotion their visit created, the *Couvre face Imhoff* saluted the national ships with fifteen guns the moment they hoisted their anchors. The senior ship (*Brunswijk*) returned the salute.²²⁴ Back in the Netherlands Sels and Pruijst reported that though they had substantial crew shortages, they were unaware of any deserters onboard their ships until some of their officers alerted them to it.²²⁵ The matter received no further attention.

²¹⁸ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 21/2/1783, pp.47-8.

²¹⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 25/2/1783; J. Pruijst (Captain *Brunswijk*) – Council of Policy, 24/2/1783 and 3/3/1783 and J. Sels (Captain *Jason*) – Council of Policy, 24/2/1783 and 3/3/1783 pp.50-1 and 362-6.

²²⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 4/3/1783, p.71.

²²¹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 7/3/1783, pp.78-80.

²²² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 11/3/1783 and Uitgaande Brieven, Van Plettenberg – Heeren XVII, 12/4/1783, pp.81-4 and p.472.

²²³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Inkomende Brieven, J. Sels – Council of Policy, 12/3/1783 and Resolutiën, 14/3/1783, pp.367-8 and p.87.

²²⁴ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Dagregister, 24/3/1783, pp.289-90.

²²⁵ NAN 1.01.47.29.124. Generaal Relas van Capitaine ter Zee ..., 1782-1784.

The most heavily armed VOC ships (*Holland*, *Ganges*, *Voorberg* and *Zeeuw*) had to go to Ceylon. It was also thought (a belated notion at best) that these ships might be of use to De Suffren as they carried 18-pounders and the French had requested that one of the heavily armed ships should be made available to them.²²⁶ At the Cape much trouble was taken to prepare and provision these ships properly as they transported the Luxemburg Regiment to Ceylon.²²⁷ They departed on 10 February 1783. As soon as the sailors in hospital recuperated, the *Zeepaard*, *Schoonderlo*, *Java* and *Bodt* had to take troops to Batavia. Despite crew shortages on the *Schoonderlo*, final preparations were finished by 2 April and the *Schoonderlo*, *Bodt* and *Zeepaard* departed on 11 April 1783,²²⁸ while the *Java* departed on 6 May 1783.²²⁹ These visits (the warships and the VOC ships) illustrated the neglect of proud Dutch maritime traditions. The VOC had difficulties to adequately equip and provision its ships for war and they were in a poor condition, which resulted in loss of life. Fortunately for the VOC, these ships never had to take position in a battle line against the British Royal Navy.

When the loss of Trincomalee and Negapatnam became known in 1782, the VOC repeated its request for military support from the state. The Prince of Orange, as Admiral-General, ordered a naval squadron to be despatched to the East, while the States-General was also convinced that it was very important to assist the VOC at the first opportunity: "...assistentie kwamen te vereisschen...hoe eerder zoo beeter ..."230 Though they were well aware that the naval forces of the Republic were in a bad state ("zwakke staat van de zeemagt"), warships would provide protection to VOC possessions and were considered the best defence. The squadron (two ships of the line, two 50-gun ships and two frigates) would be under the command of Captain J.P. van Braam, while the VOC would have to support and provision the ships, hospitalise the sick and supplement the crews if necessary.²³¹ Before the squadron was dispatched to the East, hostilities ceased, but the perception was that the presence of a Dutch

²²⁶ NAN VOC4298, Memorie van den fransche commissaris der marine de heer Percheron en raden van politie aan de Caab overgelevert, inhoudende versoen om een der zwaarste gearmeerde scheepen over te geeven, 21/12/1782, pp.528-9; and Memorie van den heer brigadier De Conway aan gemelde heer Percheron, 20/12/1782. p.530.

²²⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 24/12/1782, pp.299-303.

²²⁸ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Bewindhebberen Kamer Middelburg, 22/7/1783 and Council of Policy – Bewindhebberen ter Camer Delft, 22/7/1783; and Dagregister, 31/3/1783; 1/4/1782, 2/4/1783 and 11/4/1783, pp. 529-30, 291, 293 and 295.

²²⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Governor-General, 6/5/1783, p.500.

²³⁰ NAN 1.01.50 – 1198, Extract uit het Register der Resolutiën van de Hoog Mogenden Heren Staten Generaal der Vereenigde Nederlanden, 16/12/1782.

²³¹ NAN VOC11513, Extract uit het Register der Resolutiën van de Hoog Mog: Heren Staaten Generaal der Vereenigde Nederlanden, 16/12/1782.

squadron in the East would place a damper on British expansionism. By dispatching the squadrons to the East, the Dutch Republic followed in the footsteps of the British and the French, whose navies were already active in the East for decades.²³² Van Braam's squadron arrived at the Cape early in July 1783. Though too late to have an influence on the maritime war, it was very important for the status of the Netherlands. (The role of Van Braam's squadron will be discussed in the following chapter.)

6.3. Events at the Cape and Control of Shipping

Reports of British ships around the Cape abounded. It was a danger to shipping while to the Cape a constant threat, real or imagined of a British attack, existed. News of the Bickerton force specifically caused much anxiety as another attempt on the Cape was feared. French warships frequently visited the Cape, either on their way to Mauritius, on patrol from Mauritius, or to acquire provisions. The Cape authorities felt quite insecure when there was not one French warship present.

Late in the afternoon on 25 October 1781 the Lion's Head lookout reported nine sails. Some showed French colours, but as the nationality of the ships was uncertain, the fortifications were immediately manned. Orders were issued to all the batteries, specifically the new *Mouille Battery*, not to allow ships to enter the anchorage during the night. Two ships appeared opposite the *Mouille* at about 22:00 and a few warning shots were fired. The ships continued and when fire was directed at them, they turned around. The next morning four French ships from Rochefort anchored in Table Bay. They explained that a British warship chased them within sight of the Cape, and as a result three vessels (*Le Rosalie*, *Le Necker* and *Le Sévère*) and the French frigate *Le Bellone*, that escorted the convoy, were still missing.²³³ *Le Rosalie* arrived two days later and reported that though the British warship captured two of the French ships, they were rescued by the French frigate. This was not the case, as it was later confirmed that *Le Necker* and *Le Sévère* were captured by a British warship within sight of the Cape.²³⁴ No mention was made of the fate of *Le Bellone*, but from correspondence on French ship-movements, it could be deduced that she was not captured.

²³² F.S. Gaastra, "Sware continuerende Lasten ..." and G. Teitler, 'De Marine en de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler, *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, pp.61 and 99.

²³³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister, 25/10/1781 and 26/10/1781, p.275-6.

²³⁴ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 7/12/1781, p.186.

The French corvette *Le Helene* that arrived at Simon's Bay on 24 August 1782 reported that she met a British ship at sea close to False Bay, but she was able to outrun the British vessel. At the same time the VOC ship *Huis te Spijk* was lying in False Bay without a rudder and as the French warships present at the Cape were destined to depart, her Captain was ordered to set his ship alight if the British appeared, to prevent its valuable cargo from falling into enemy hands.²³⁵

In October 1782 before the French warship *L'Apollon* (52) sailed for Mauritius with a small convoy of four ships, reports arrived from Saldanha Bay that five ships and a cutter (not displaying any flags) were seen off the coast. To establish if there were any enemy ships prying around, the French ship *Mars* was ordered to cruise around the Cape on 7 October. She returned a week later, having seen nothing, but with storm damage.²³⁶ Due to the sea conditions and the long voyages many French ships, specifically warships, and their crews required much assistance and maintenance. The typical support naval vessels received at the Cape were items like wood, lead, pick, tar, resin, thread for sails and paper.²³⁷ As the Cape had a chronic shortage of wood for masts and spars, wood had to be imported from Mauritius and the East.

Good intelligence is crucial to success in war because of its value to decision-making. A belligerent aims at gaining information about an enemy, while trying to prevent an enemy from doing the same. On its own intelligence cannot ensure success as action and inaction, military skills, disposition, preparations and a variety of other variables are crucial for success. However, correct decisions could not be made without intelligence, or with the wrong intelligence. For the Cape defenders intelligence provided early warning and gave them time to prepare. In warfare on land intelligence was gained through reconnaissance, cavalry and spies, whereas the Cape (a maritime province), depended on shipping for strategic and operational intelligence. To acquire reliable intelligence timely was always difficult due to the distances involved and the slow, often unreliable, communications. Ships that had to convey messages took months; they could be delayed or were even captured. A problem was that the Cape had no naval ability of its own to reconnoitre the coast or to warn of an impending danger and in terms of intelligence gathering and messages the Cape firstly relied on the French Navy and then on its own limited ability (provided by the *Herstelder* and *Postiljon*).

Ships always brought news. When the *Postiljon* returned from Ceylon in October 1781 it brought valuable intelligence about the war between the British and Haider Ali, as well as much

²³⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 13/8/1782 and Dagregister, 24/8/1782, pp.225, 350.
²³⁶ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Dagregister, 7/10/1782 and 21/10/1782; as well as *Uitgaande Brieven, Van Plettenberg – Heeren XVII*, 24/10/1782, pp.360, 363 and 526-7.

detail on British ship and troop movements. The insecurity of Ceylon was obvious as the correspondence emphasised the lack of warships and the urgent need for reinforcements. The Governor and Council wrote to Van Plettenberg: “wij in deeze omstandigheden naar de spoedige komst van de fransche vloot met smarten verlangen ... ook hoopen wij op een spoedig ontzet uijt Europa ...”²³⁸ However, the *Postiljon* was not suited for this role and when she sailed to Europe with despatches, the British captured her on 7 February 1783.²³⁹

Gaining intelligence was only one side of the coin. In war guarding intelligence was just as valuable as gathering it. To prevent important intelligence about the Cape and its military and naval disposition from falling into enemy hands, neutral ships that visited the Cape were controlled as well as the movement of British citizens or possible spies onboard such vessels. This often happened and at times it caused much tension with specifically Denmark.

In June 1781 Captain De Roche of *Le Serapis* suspected a Danish ship at anchor in Simon's Bay, the *Princess Frederica*, of being British or carrying British cargo and he wanted to capture her. The Danish Captain asked for Dutch protection and stated that his cargo and freight papers were open to inspection.²⁴⁰ Brandt and Staring (the *Equipagiemeester*) inspected the cargo and as it was in order, the ship was placed under Dutch protection. Brandt had to order the Dutch soldiers to fire at the French, if they tried to capture the ship.²⁴¹

After De Suffren's arrival the two Danish ships in Simon's Bay (the *Princes Frederica* and *Copenhagen*) were not allowed to sail to prevent them from providing the British at St Helena with intelligence regarding the French squadron and the state of affairs at the Cape.²⁴² Van Plettenberg wrote to De Suffren on 3 July and asked him to assist as they wished to delay the departure of the Danish ships. De Suffren was assured that he would act under the protection of the Dutch flag and that the Governor would consult with him before allowing any Danish ships to sail.²⁴³ A month later the two Danish Captains bitterly complained about their detention. The Council simply answered that they would forward the complaints to the *Heeren XVII*.²⁴⁴ On receiving news about the Saldanha Bay incident, Brandt immediately ordered all the Danish

²³⁷ See for example *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 27/8/1782, p.229.

²³⁸ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Inkomende Brieven, Goeveueur en Raad van Ceilon – Van Plettenberg, 27/6/1781, pp.331-4.

²³⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Goeverneur General en Raad, 8/9/1783, p.543.

²⁴⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën and Dagregister, 6/6/1781, pp.92-3 and 248.

²⁴¹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën and Dagregister, 16/6/1781, pp.93-4 and 249.

²⁴² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 3/7/1781 and Dagregister, 3/7/1781, pp.98 and 254.

²⁴³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Secreete Particuliere Brieven, Van Plettenberg – De Suffren, 3/7/1781, pp.261-2.

²⁴⁴ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 3/8/1781, p.114.

officers and their passengers (including British passengers) back onboard, to prevent a message about the Dutch ships in Hout Bay from reaching the British in Saldanha Bay. The Danish officers were later allowed ashore again, but not the British passengers.²⁴⁵

On 31 August the Danish warship *Wagerin* (60) commanded by Captain Bille, arrived at the Cape. A week later Bille asked Van Plettenberg to explain within five days why the two Danish ships were still held.²⁴⁶ No decision of the Council of Policy exists, but in a secret letter Van Plettenberg explained to Bille that it had to do with the safety of the Cape, as they believed that a strong British naval squadron, on its way to the East, was at St Helena Island. The Danish ships had British passengers onboard and they wished to prevent the British from gaining sensitive information. Van Plettenberg emphasised that the Cape was valuable to the Danish and that they had a good relationship, while Danish East Indiamen anyhow waited for a Danish warship to escort them to Europe.²⁴⁷ Soon afterwards, on 21 September, the Danish ships sailed, with important secret documents (in a lead box) for the *Heeren XVII*.²⁴⁸

The Danish merchantman, *de Hoop* (*Habet* in Danish) that arrived at the Cape in the middle of October 1781 required urgent repairs. When she was ready to sail two months later, the French naval representative, Percheron, insisted that she should be prevented as she had British officers with sealed papers onboard and the British must not know that there were temporarily no French warships at the Cape.²⁴⁹ She eventually continued her voyage to Europe on 18 February 1782.²⁵⁰

Another Danish ship, *t'Casteel van Dansburg*, under the command of Captain Fuglede (or Fugleday), arrived from India on 11 January 1782 with three English passengers (Colonel Cosby, Major Grant and Captain Hicks) onboard.²⁵¹ For security reasons Percheron and De Conway insisted that she should not be allowed to depart as those onboard could divulge sensitive information to the British regarding the French military strength at the Cape, the Dutch ship *Catwijk aan Rhyn* and the French ship *Les deux Hélénes* (that took supplies to Mauritius) and the French ship *Le Comte de Narbonne* (that carried official sealed dispatches to France).²⁵²

²⁴⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Inkomende Brieven, Brandt – Van Plettenberg, 23/7/1781, p.325.

²⁴⁶ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister, 31/8/1781 and Resolutiën, 11/9/1781, pp.126-7 and 270.

²⁴⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Secreete Particuliere Brieven, Van Plettenberg – Bille, 12/9/1781, p.266-7.

²⁴⁸ See *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Uitgaande Brieven, September 1781; and Dagregister, 21/9/1781 and 25/9/1781, p.271 and 421.

²⁴⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 7/12/1781, pp.184-6.

²⁵⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 9/2/1782 and Dagregister 18/2/1782, pp.54 and 317.

²⁵¹ A. Staring, *Damiaan Hugo Staring. Een Zeeman uit de Achttiende Eeuw*, p.93.

²⁵² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 12/1/1782, pp.24-5.

Secret information the French specifically did not want to leak out, was the fact that De Suffren was on his way to India. It was feared that the *Maria Aletta*, which had just arrived from Mauritius, might divulge this information to *t'Casteel van Dansburg*.²⁵³

On 12 January 1782 the Council of Policy decided that *t'Casteel van Dansburg* may not depart, its officers and the British passengers onboard would not be allowed ashore, the ship's rudder had to be removed, while boats from the Cape would ferry the necessary provisions to the ship.²⁵⁴ Furthermore, *De Postiljon*, took up position between the two Danish ships to prevent them from communicating. This was much to the disdain of Captain Fuglede and the scene was now set for an interesting event that would involve three actors, *t'Casteel van Dansburg*, the coastal batteries and the *Equipagiemeester*.

The *Equipagiemeester* was Damiaan Hugo Staring, a naval officer from a prominent naval family, on leave from the Admiralty of Amsterdam. He was appointed as Captain of the VOC ship *de Both* and in May 1772 he became the *Equipagiemeester* at the Cape. In 1778 he was promoted to the naval rank "kapitein-ter-zee" (equivalent of Colonel).²⁵⁵ While a number of Staring's family members were fighting at sea during the dark days of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, he also stood on the deck of a ship, being fired upon. The important difference was that it was not enemy fire, but his own guns firing at him.

At 05:30 on Sunday 13 January, Staring and Captain De Lille took the message to *t'Casteel van Dansburg*. When Staring arrived on board and saw many weapons on the upper deck, he knew it was not going to be a friendly reception. Fuglede was furious about the decision of the Council of Policy and refused to have his rudder removed. Staring replied that they would remove it by force, upon which Fuglede called his crew to general quarters and armed them. Captain Hicks, who was on the upper deck, drew his sabre and implored Fuglede to chop off his anchor cable and depart with Staring on board. Staring warned Fuglede that it would be in contravention of international law²⁵⁶ and when Staring tried to get assistance from *Postiljon* or from his boat, he was seized by Hicks and a few others and taken below. The Danish crew threatened to shoot at the Dutch boats. Staring's boat, as well as the five boats with VOC sailors that had to assist if the rudder was to be removed by force, moved out of range of the Danish weapons and returned to the jetty. Fuglede then cut his anchor cable, made sail and prepared his ship for action. Although one of the VOC ships fired into the rigging of the

²⁵³ A. Staring, *Damiaan Hugo Staring*, p.94.

²⁵⁴ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 12/1/1782, pp.24-5.

²⁵⁵ A. Staring, *Damiaan Hugo Staring*, pp.23, 26 and 40.

²⁵⁶ See *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 13/1/1782, pp.26-8; and the copies of the reports by Staring and De Lille in A. Staring, *Damiaan Hugo Staring*, pp.95-6, 194-5 and 201.

Danish ship, the guns from the *Chavonnes Battery* soon commenced firing. They damaged the sails and rigging of the ship and fired into her hull. Staring was apparently assaulted and four armed men forced him to the upper deck during the cannonade.²⁵⁷ When the foretopsail of *t'Casteel van Dansburg* came crashing down onto the deck, Fuglede turned to and anchored, but in accordance with their instructions, gunfire from the forts only stopped when the Dane struck his flag. Fuglede surrendered to Staring, and later 80 VOC soldiers under the command of two officers came onboard to secure the ship.²⁵⁸

The Council of Policy saw the incident as a violation of the international law ("volkereg"). Fuglede was arrested, and the Independent Fiscal had to investigate the matter and take action if necessary. An armed guard had to maintain order onboard, while Staring immediately despatched the carpenters to plug the holes on the waterline. The English passengers (with the exception of Hicks who was confined onboard the VOC ship *Morgenster*) were allowed ashore on their honour and under stipulated conditions.²⁵⁹

Staring became somewhat of a popular hero. Soon the incident became mythical: in a dramatic contemporary portrayal by Le Vaillant, Staring was tied to the mast and the 1797 edition of Le Vaillant even contains a drawing depicting it. More twists were added to the tale, but generally Staring remains the brave hero, being abused on deck, but standing his ground under fire. For A. Staring, D.H. Staring was the cool and calculated naval hero in the family mould: "...liep hij hetzelfde gevaar van door eigen kogels te worden gedood, waaronder hij koelbloedig bleef, gelijk van een marineofficier te verwachten was".²⁶⁰

Although it was thought that perhaps the ship was not Danish, her papers indicated that she was – which had serious implications. It generated much correspondence between the Cape and the authorities in the Netherlands and in Batavia.²⁶¹ The High Council of the Indies was upset, and reminded the Cape to be more careful with foreign ships due to the Armed Neutrality Agreement of July 1701.²⁶² Representative from the Danish Government in The Hague complained formally about the general treatment of Danish ships at the Cape, and asked the Dutch to explain the *t'Casteel van Dansburg* incident. The Dutch view was that the

²⁵⁷ See the copies of the reports by Staring and De Lille in A. Staring, *Damiaan Hugo Staring*, pp.96-7, 195-8 and 202.

²⁵⁸ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 13/1/1782, pp.26-7.

²⁵⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 13/1/1782, pp.28-31.

²⁶⁰ A. Staring, *Damiaan Hugo Staring*, pp.97-9.

²⁶¹ See the various letters and reports mostly written early in 1782 from the Governor and Council of Policy, Captain Fuglede (in German) Staring and De Lille in NAN, VOC4298, pp.32, 43-4, 229, 230, 231-239, 240-3, 244, 330-3, 415-21, 559-60.

²⁶² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Inkomende Brieven, Goeverneur General en Raad – Council of Policy, 18/10/1782, pp.358.

relationship with Denmark and the Danish company should not be damaged and after the VOC explained the full story, the matter was resolved diplomatically.²⁶³ The incident illustrated to the Cape that they had to be careful in their treatment of neutral vessels and not break the conditions of the Armed Neutrality. The High Council of the Indies also notified Van Plettenberg that they were concerned about the fact that two British officers with secret despatches onboard a Danish ships (*Hoop*), were allowed ashore. This should not happen again and if enemy officers went ashore, they had to become prisoners of war.²⁶⁴

Detaining neutral ships at the Cape for security purposes still occurred after the *t'Castee/ van Dansburg* incident. After arriving at the Cape on 16 October 1782 Captain Lutken of the Danish warship *Infods Redden* (64) asked Van Plettenberg to allow two Danish ships to depart. It was granted, but only after *L'Apollon* had departed to Mauritius with her convoy.²⁶⁵ A few months later, when a French convoy (five cargo ships and one frigate) ready to depart to Mauritius was in Table Bay, two Danish ships (*Constantia* and *Azia*) were not allowed to sail before 13 March (the departure date of the French convoy).²⁶⁶ The Captains of the Danish ships complained and their protests, together with the motivations from Percheron for delaying the ships, were dispatched to the *Heeren XVII*.²⁶⁷ The VOC was not only a trading company but also had a diplomatic role to play.

7. CONCLUSION

Anglophile scholars often emphasised the brilliant victory of Rodney over the De Grasse at the Battle of the Saints in 1782. The irony is that contrary to the pattern in the naval clashes between French and Britain, French naval feats were not inconsiderable during the war. Strategically De Grasse's earlier actions prevented Cornwallis from being re-supplied by sea and despite British successes in the war, short term French sea control made Yorktown

²⁶³ NAN, VOC4920, Stukken betreffende de slechte behandeling van het schip *Kasteel van Dansburg* van de Deense Oostindische Compagnie door de overheden in Kaap de Goede Hoop, 1782.

²⁶⁴ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Inkomende Brieven, Goeverneur General en Raad – Council of Policy, 18/10/1782, pp.359-60.

²⁶⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Dagregister, 16/10/1782 and Uitgaande Brieven, Bergh – Lutken, 28/10/1781, p.362.

²⁶⁶ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 7/3/1783, p.81.

²⁶⁷ See numerous protests to Van Plettenberg and the Council of Policy by the Danish Captains in NAN VOC4295, p.31 and VOC4298, pp.203-4; by Captain Lutken of the Danish warship *Infods Retten* in VOC4298, pp.482-4 as well as the letters by the French Commissioner Percheron in VOC4298, pp.478 and 485.

possible. At the same time the indomitable De Suffren first thwarted the Johnstone expedition, fought Hughes to a standstill and then recaptured VOC possessions such as Trincomalee.

The Fourth-Anglo Dutch War was a trade war and as a result it was about sea power. Sea power made the destruction of enemy commerce and support of own commerce possible and it was also crucial for power projection and defence. Navies were tools of policy and though the belligerents had mutually exclusive objectives, in the end they fought for trade and sea power. One thing the war undoubtedly imprinted on the minds of politicians was that sea power became a critical element in diplomacy.

Britain would have captured the Cape in 1781, if it was not for De Suffren. Due to his naval action at Porto Praya, it was possible for the French to reach the Cape first. The fact that *L'Hannibal* was dismantled is proof of the terrible firepower the British possessed. This did not hamper the French; they created a jury-rig and towed *L'Hannibal* all the way to the Cape. The Johnstone expedition failed because of a lack of secrecy and insufficient precautions during the voyage. Johnstone did not have enough driving force, lacked initiative, was a poor commander and seemingly had no urge to seek out his enemy and fight him whenever he could be found. He took liberties, but De Suffren was not the opponent to take chances with!

Naval battles need not be decisive to have great effect. Often success is in control of the sea or the fact that naval forces were judiciously employed (as the Yorktown example showed). No decisive battle took place at Porto Praya, in fact it was not a clear tactical victory to the French, but in strategic terms it was very important. Johnstone was hesitant to venture close to Cape Town or False Bay because of the mere existence of the French fleet – the so-called fleet-in-being idea. The former intimidation by the British Royal Navy, so characteristic before the war, was now non-existent.

Saldanha Bay was a severe financial blow to the declining VOC and illustrated how important well-defended bases along a valuable and contested sea route were. It is easy to safeguard ships against capture in a protected and secure anchorage, while the protection of warships would prevent an enemy from entering anchorages. Proper defence against a maritime enemy therefore also implied safety of shipping in ports. The British raiding strategy (of Dutch commerce) did much damage during the war. In the end the Johnstone expedition of 1781 turned out to be no more than a raid as Johnstone failed in his aim to conquer the Cape because De Suffren strengthened its defence. His raid (the capture of the Dutch ships) was typical of the effect of a raiding strategy: it weakened the Dutch materially, strategically and morally.

The ineptness of VOC officials and their disregard for orders in both Saldanha Bay and Hout Bay is indicative of the poor state in which VOC affairs were and of an incredible fear for the British Royal Navy. The former zealotry, with which a massive trade empire was created, had gone and imprudence prevailed. In addition, the VOC ships equipped for war were not proper warships and were poorly fitted-out and provisioned. The result was a disastrous voyage to the Cape. Despite requests for support from the Dutch State, nothing materialised and the scarce resources of the VOC were stretched to the limit. The British approach on the other hand, was completely the opposite despite some setbacks during the war. Through an ardent attitude and coordination of effort (commercial and military with state support) they were creating a large Eastern empire. Britain still had tremendous naval advantages as she had a large, strong and professional navy with a secure organisational setup. Few others could boast this and the British learnt the naval lessons of the war well.

De Suffren's success as a naval commander was curbed by a want of dependable and capable Captains. His Captains seemed to have lacked the intuitive aggressive approach so common amongst British Royal Navy officers at the time, but not present in the French Navy. His characteristic vehemence sometimes caused him to disregard prudence, as the example of Porto Praya indicated, yet as a naval commander he displayed relentless energy and resourcefulness. He fully understood that the security of the maritime empires of the VOC and France depended on eliminating the enemy's naval threat. Central in his conception was the critical appreciation that success at sea was determined by the defeat of your enemy and not by merely outmanoeuvring him, a common thread in warfare on land in the eighteenth century. French naval officers of the period often disregarded this fact; however, it made De Suffren a most formidable enemy and gave him an understanding of naval warfare that guaranteed his place amongst the great commanders in the age of sail.

The Cape was of value to the French because it supplied Mauritius and served as a base for the French Navy. As French military operations in the Indian Ocean depended on well provisioned soldiers and sailors, the Cape was strategically important and its assistance was valuable to French operations.²⁶⁸ When a British expedition was despatched to capture the Cape, it did not succeed because of the opportune arrival of French assistance. As Gordon emphasised in a letter to the *Heeren XVII*, French assistance was crucial and it was the brave actions of De Suffren ("de kundige operatiën van zyne dapperen vlood-voogd De Suffren") and

²⁶⁸ CA VC121, J.P. van Braam, *Memorien en Aanmerkingen over den Staat der Colonie en besitting Van de Nederlandsche Oost Indische Compagnie aan Caab de Goede Hoop, December 1783 to February 1784*, pp.16-22.

his fleet, which really saved the Cape.²⁶⁹ As will be discussed in the next chapter, French troops were at the Cape to the end of the war and they contributed significantly to placing its defences on a more substantial footing.

²⁶⁹CA VC117, Gordon – *Heeren XVII*, 1/5/1784, pp.9-10.

*Chapter 5***THE DEFENCE OF THE CAPE TO THE END OF THE WAR: 1781-1784****1. INTRODUCTION**

In the 1770's the VOC was still a large commercial enterprise, with more than 20 East Indiamen with Asian products returning to Europe each year. However, it faced many problems such as the competition with other European maritime powers and the rising cost in the Asian trade, while its internal weaknesses made it vulnerable. This was clearly demonstrated by the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War as the VOC was not capable of properly defending its possessions.¹ The Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-84) meant a dramatic change in the fortunes of the VOC as many richly laden VOC ships were lost. It was in financial distress and its struggle for survival commenced.

The fact that De Suffren was able to secure the Cape had an important effect on the rest of the war, as it offered logistic support to the French and acted as a base to French forces engaged in the war in the Indian Ocean. As French operations in the Indian Ocean, hinged on Mauritius, its source of supplies (the Cape) had to be secure. This gave De Suffren the freedom to engage in a series of desperate battles with Hughes which nearly succeeded in undoing much of the British work in India.

If naval forces failed to protect the Cape, fixed defences and landward forces had to be available, to fulfil this role and provide defence against an attacking force. Though French warships often visited the Cape and conducted patrols in the southern Indian Ocean, their visits to the Cape were irregular and could not be depended upon as a permanent feature in the defence of the Cape. Cape Town was the seat of power, or the centre of gravity, in the defence of the Cape and it would be the objective of an attacking enemy. An enemy would therefore aim to land at the Cape, or as close to it as possible. The first priority in the defence of the Cape would therefore be to improve the fixed defences for defence against warships, amphibious landings and an enemy marching overland. These fixed defences had to be

¹ F.S. Gaastra, 'War, Competition and Collaboration ...' in H.V. Bowen, M. Lincoln and N. Rigby, *The World of the East India Company*, p.66.

manned and a military land force had to be available to conduct operations ashore. As the Cape Garrison was small, the Khoi unit that was raised and the burgher militia had to bolster the defence in an emergency. In addition substantial foreign troops served at the Cape during the war, which included both French auxiliary troops and foreign regiments in VOC service. Considering the time and place, altogether an impressive landward deterrent existed.

With the Cape secure, the emphasis of the VOC was on the defence of its rich and vast empire in the East. Its anxiety about the security of its commercial interests is evident from correspondence the Cape received from the Netherlands, Batavia and other VOC possessions during the war. The Dutch Republic was initially not in the position to provide assistance to its interests in the East, and when the State eventually got round to it, it was too late to impact on the war.

The purpose of the chapter is to discuss the remainder of the war, with the emphasis on the landward defence of the Cape. The war had a considerable impact on the Cape and some socio-economic aspects warrants brief attention. In military terms the focus will fall on the local military organisation and its unsolved problems, French-Dutch cooperation as well as the French and foreign regiments serving at the Cape. The chapter also explains the expansion to the fixed defences and concludes with a brief overview of the final stages of the war and its immediate aftermath.

2. WARTIME CONDITIONS AT THE CAPE

The Fourth Anglo-Dutch War had an important impact on the Cape. French regiments were stationed at the Cape while the French Navy and French expeditionary forces were regular visitors. For close to three years (June 1781 to April 1784) the French played a leading role in the defence of the Cape. During this time the Cape was on a wartime footing and many of the elements typical to wartime societies manifested on the military, political and socio-economic levels. A quick glance at the official documents of the Cape illustrates the dominance of defence issues during these years. Typical of the situation in wartime, politically scant attention was often given to some of other burning issues while the Cape authorities, as well as the VOC, used the war as an excuse for non-action. The example of the unresolved grievances of the so-called Cape *Patriotte* provides proof of this. Social life, specifically in Cape Town, was dominated by soldiers and the military. As many soldiers were stationed at the Cape, much cross-cultural interaction took place while the Cape experienced a short-term economic boom due to the higher demand for its produce during the war. Yet, due to the war,

restrictions were placed on many aspects of daily life and there was a higher degree of control over the population, specifically visitors. Military spending increased dramatically and special economic measures, like paper money and price control, were introduced.

Despite the substantial French assistance and the large French presence at the Cape, the VOC was adamant that they had to remain in full control of the Cape. The Castle had to be occupied by VOC troops, not French troops or foreign regiments, and the VOC had to command all the troops along the Sea Lines.² The Council of Policy remained the highest political authority, and the French did not have representation on it. They, specifically Percheron, frequently made submissions to the Council, which were taken seriously and often influenced policy decisions. The defence of the Cape ultimately rested on the Governor's shoulders as he was the highest executive authority. Van Plettenberg had scant insight into military affairs and did not wish to make some of the important military decisions alone. He thus formed a *Krijgsraad* (Council of War), which consisted of the VOC commanders (Gordon and Gilquin) as well as the senior French military commanders.³ In practice, however, military decisions were essentially influenced by the French. In typical revolutionary terms one of the French officers, Barras (the later French revolutionary), remembered Van Plettenberg at this time as "a fat Dutchman" while "his wife thought that her own plumpness gave her the right to be no less insolent than her husband. These two vain creatures, isolated in their palace, were feared by the inhabitants".⁴ He however had good words for Secunde Hacker and Independent Fiscal Boers.

European wars usually had a positive effect on the prices of agricultural produce at the Cape as the demand for it rose drastically due to the large fleets visiting the Cape. After the Netherlands became involved in the war and due to the French-Dutch co-operation, foreign ships visiting the Cape increased. From June 1781 to the end of 1783, it amounted to 276 ships, of which 129 were French. On average 135 ships per year visited the Cape (between 1781 and 1784), while the highpoint for foreign ships visiting was 1783, when it rose to a record of 151.⁵ Though only 29 of these ships were Dutch, it must be taken into consideration that the VOC chartered many neutral ships to transport its goods, which also increased the number of foreign ships. Many of the French vessels that visited were warships or troopships,

² NAN VOC4537, Plan voor de inkwartiering aan Kabo de Goede Hoop van het Regiment van den Chevalier de Luxembourg, benewens eenige huishoudelijke consideratien rakende dat Regiment, 4/4/1781.

³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 2/4/1782, p.117.

⁴ P. de Barras, *Mémoires*, quoted in R. Lacour-Gayet, *A History of South Africa*, p.43.

which meant that they had more men onboard and they usually stayed longer than the average merchantmen.

The economic depression, and oversupply of agricultural products at the Cape, therefore came to an end. It was a period of false economic prosperity as the demand for local products, and the value of commodities, increased dramatically. The VOC government created a system of price control to protect their allies and to curb inflation.⁶ Many at the Cape grew prosperous from the war and the high demand that existed for their produce. Agricultural products became expensive and VOC officials found it difficult to manage on their meagre salaries. As a result their salaries, the salaries of the Garrison and of the Regiment de Meuron were increased in 1783.⁷

The provisioning of the French auxiliary troops, French convoys and Mauritius placed a great burden on the agriculture production of the Cape. For example, in terms of red meat, Johannes Gysbertes van Reenen (who had the VOC's meat contract) delivered about 45000 sheep and 5000 head of cattle within a year.⁸ Specific quantities were set aside for the French and shortages often occurred in the supply of meat, brandy and wine, as well as with a few other products. This implied that other ships calling at the Cape sometimes did not obtain everything they needed, as the Captain of the Danish warship *Infods Retten* experienced when he could only be supplied with a small amount of the wine, and none of the brandy he requested.⁹

Socially the presence of a large number of French troops and officers had a great influence on the Cape during the war and French manners, fashions and values became very popular.¹⁰ The style of living was gay as French officers introduced a taste for pleasure and they seemed to have been at the height of society standing. The Cape was referred to as "little Paris" and even had a French theatre. During the day the soldiers manoeuvred and exercised, while in the evenings they performed plays for Cape society.¹¹ French fashions were relentlessly pursued as the inhabitants tried to simulate French manners and appearance, often with little taste and to the ridicule of mordant French observers like Le Vaillant and Barras. Le Vaillant was not impressed; he stated that the natural and elegant Dutch

⁵ C. Beyers, *Die Kaapse Patriotte*, p.155; and G.M. Theal, *History of Africa South of the Zambesi*, III, p.151.

⁶ A.E. Walker, *A History of South Africa*, pp.108-9.

⁷ G.A. le Roux, *Europese Oorloë en die Kaap*, p.114.

⁸ G. Wagenaar, Johannes Gysbertus van Reenen, pp.63-5 and 72-3.

⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolusiën, 22/10/1782, pp.253-5.

¹⁰ P.J. Idenburg, *De Kaap de Goede Hoop gedurende de laatste jaren van het Nederlandsch Bewind*, p.8.

pleasantness (especially of the females) had gone and was replaced by a caricature of French fashions.¹² The market for luxury items grew, social events abounded and many dances and balls were held. On 25 August 1783 the French festival of St Louis was celebrated at the Cape, with the VOC hosting a grand ball in the Castle. After the French departed the prosperity did not last.¹³

As can be expected all social interaction between the more affluent inhabitants of Cape Town and the French officers were not positive. Cloete narrated an interesting example, the case of the elderly widow Van Oudshoorn (aged 61) and the twenty year old Lieutenant St Maurice of the Luxemburg Regiment. Mrs Van Oudtshoorn wanted to marry St Maurice and ordered the Landdrost of Stellenbosch to hand over her cash (about 150 Rixdollars) and securities (worth about f500 000) to an officer of the regiment. The Landdrost was suspicious of the affair and an investigation was launched by the Council of Justice. After they interrogated the aspirant bridegroom, they found that the money was divided between him and his accomplices, with the largest share going to Colonel d'Hugonet. Everything was recovered and the officers were arrested and deported to Europe. The unfortunate widow Van Oudtshoorn persisted that she loved and wished to marry St Maurice. She was placed under guardianship and her chair was removed from the church!¹⁴

Information about signals was always secret and during the war aspects relating to ships and their sailing schedules were very sensitive. As much of the correspondence was classified, special regulations were put in place with regards to handling and receiving, as well as posting and addressing such correspondence. Secret letters for the Netherlands were not addressed to the *Heeren XVII*, but as secret issues were mostly handled by the Committee for Secret Affairs, the letters were placed in a sealed envelope addressed to Advocate F.W. Boers, the First Advocate of the VOC, or to one of the other members of the Committee.¹⁵

To protect intelligence, control was necessary, not only over ships, but also of British passengers on ships and visitors of other nations to the Cape. Foreigners, specifically British citizens were regarded with suspicion and their movements were restricted because they could gather valuable defence intelligence on the fortifications, military units, armaments, strengths and weaknesses of fixed defences, operational readiness and the movement of warships and

¹¹ P. Cullinan, *Robert Jacob Gordon*, pp.134-5.

¹² F. Le Valliant, *Reize in de Binnelanden van Afrika, Langs de Kaap De Goede Hoop*, I, p.xiv.

¹³ A.E. Walker, *A History of South Africa*, pp.108-9.

¹⁴ *Briefwisseling van Hendrik Swellengrebel*, *Caabsche Nouvelles van't Jaar 1781*, Cloete – Swellengrebel (undated and unsigned), pp.190-2.

convoys. In fact British peacetime literature (both before and after the war) is an indication of how well British travellers, specifically officers and East India employees, analysed the defensive situation at the Cape.

If the movements of foreign visitors and potential spies were not well enough controlled, it caused problems. Van de Perre and Boers reprimanded Van Plettenberg about the Harbour Master of Madras who was onboard a Danish ship visiting the Cape in October 1781. He was not only allowed ashore, but also had very important correspondence from the British Council in Madras in his possession. As it probably contained information regarding the British plans on the Coromandel Coast, it should have been confiscated, which was fair and in accordance with the rules of war. In future they had to check the credentials of passengers better.¹⁶ In a letter, probably about the same incident, the High Council of the Indies stated they received a distressing report from Percheron, that two British officers carrying secret despatches were allowed ashore and stayed at the Cape for a few days. They regarded this as a great risk and warned that much more care must be taken with representatives of the enemy as they used the opportunity to spy. They must not be allowed ashore and if they came ashore, they had to become prisoners of war.¹⁷

Many British passengers were not allowed ashore, while others were not allowed to leave and were quartered in at places like the VOC post at Vissershok, on their honour as gentlemen that they would not leave without permission or travel around. If British passengers onboard neutral ships were very ill and produced a medical certificate, they were allowed ashore on the understanding that they would not move from the specific house at which they recuperated.¹⁸ Sometimes, however, troublesome British “prisoners of war” were allowed to return to Europe (like Hicks who was onboard the *t’Casteel van Dansburg*),¹⁹ while British citizens quartered at the Cape from time to time appealed to the Council of Policy and were allowed to leave, mostly on the basis that they were ill. Exchange of such “prisoners of war” was rare, but did take place. On 17 June 1783 Captain Christoffel Beem, a Dutch seaman taken prisoner during the British capture of Trincomalee, arrived at the Cape in exchange for a British officer, Captain Harvey, then held at the Cape. Harvey was allowed to depart to Europe

¹⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Inkomende Secreete Brieven, Gecommitteerde Bewindhebberen – Van Plettenberg, 17/2/1781, pp.216-7.

¹⁶ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Inkomende Secreete Brieven, Van de Perre and Boers – Van Plettenberg, 7/3/1782, pp.224-7.

¹⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Inkomende Brieven, Goeverneur Generaal en Raad – Council of Policy, 18/10/1782, p.358.

¹⁸ See for example *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 10/4/1781, p.55; and *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 3/10/1782, p.245.

onboard the Danish warship *Infods Retten*.²⁰ As many of the British citizens quartered at the Cape were linked to the EEIC, an account for sustaining them during the war was afterwards sent to the EEIC.²¹ It is not clear if they ever honoured the account.

Captain Lutken of the Danish warship *Infods Retten* (64) complained to the Council of Policy in May 1783 that De Conway (Commander of the French troops) posted a French NCO outside the lodgings of one of his officers, who were then followed around while he conducted his own, and the Danish King's, business. This was a highly irregular action towards a Danish officer on Dutch soil.²² De Conway reported that he had good reason to believe that a few French deserters were on board the Danish warship and that certain Danish officers had elicited soldiers into sailing to Europe with them. The "accompanying" continued. French NCO's were not armed, ordered to pay the Danish officers the customary respect, and only had to prevent Danish officers from interacting with French soldiers. De Conway also asked Lutken to return any French deserters that might "accidentally" be onboard his ship.²³

The war placed a large financial burden on the Cape Treasury and military expenses were high. Large amounts went into war materials, equipment, training, military preparations, fortifications as well as the maintenance of French and foreign troops from the stores and magazines of the VOC. Besides expanding and improving the fortifications, it was expensive to sustain the French troops and the foreign regiments in VOC service at the Cape and maintain their operational readiness.

The total expenditure of the Cape Government was f733157:11:8 for the 1780-81 year, while two new items, not previously on the financial report, war materials and military expenses ("Trein en Oorlogs Onkosten") as well as the cost of the auxiliary French troops ("Onkosten aan de Troupen") amounted to f34761:11- and f50728:10:- respectively.²⁴ The cost (essentially accommodation and rations) of the French auxiliary troops ("hulp troupen") was on average f252746 per year from 1781 to 1784.²⁵ The foreign regiments in the service of the VOC were also expensive. The cost of the Luxemburg Regiment was f179231 during the 1782-83 financial year as it spend a full year at the Cape, while the other years were much less

¹⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 19/3/1782, p.105.

²⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Dagregister, 17/6/1783; Resolutiën, 24/6/1783 and Harvey – Council of Policy, 23/6/1783, pp.307, 384 and 163.

²¹ G.A. le Roux, *Europese Oorloë en die Kaap*, p.109.

²² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 16/5/1783, Lutken – Van Plettenberg, 15/5/1783, pp.146-7.

²³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 17/5/1783, pp.149-51.

²⁴ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 18/12/1781, pp.204-7.

²⁵ See annual financial reports attached to resolutions of the Council of Policy, C166, 9/3/1784 and C168, 22/2/1785 in <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

(f65078 in 1781-82 and f27290 in 1783-84), as the regiment was not at the Cape for the full duration of a financial year.²⁶ The Meuron Regiment placed a high financial burden on the Cape as its cost amounted to f232998 in the 1782-83 financial year, f320075 in 1783-84 and in the 1786-87 financial year it even rose to f339229.²⁷ In comparison the total cost of the Legion of Waldener only amounted to f20902 as it was not at the Cape for long.²⁸ The cost of preparing for war, war materials and maintaining the troops ("trein en oorlogs onkonsten") were constantly high since it did not only include the infantry and the artillery, but also the price of raising, equipping and maintaining the Khoi unit for more than a year. In total this item amounted to f305402 between 1780 and 1784 – an average of f76351 per year.²⁹

To put it into perspective the 1781-82 and 1778-79 financial years could be compared: During 1781-82 the cost of the foreign troops at the Cape was f793145 (with the Luxemburg troops being at the Cape for a few month only), the cost of war materials, supplies and preparing own troops amounted to f101750, the salaries of garrison were f197128 and rations amounted to f102260 (including the rations for the VOC sailors). Obviously the indirect cost of the war would also be hidden in a number of other costing points. Altogether it seems that the total expenses for the 1781-82 year amounted to f1571084, while the military cost (including the cost of fortifications) amounted to f1257835 – the difference between the two was only f313249.³⁰ By comparison during 1778-79 the total cost of running the Cape was f505264, while the total military cost (once again including fortifications and sailor's rations) amounted to f180878, with a difference between the two of f324386. Running the Cape therefore did not really become more expensive, the discrepancy was due to the cost of the war.³¹

The war undoubtedly had a significant impact on the Cape and the VOC, but typical of wartime scenario's it was to change after the war. Since much was said about the general conduct of the war, its maritime elements, and its socio-economic impact on the Cape, what was the nature of defensive organisation at the Cape during the war?

²⁶ See financial reports in the resolutions of the Council of Policy, C164, 18/2/1783; C166, 9/3/1784; and C168, 22/2/1785 in <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁷ See financial reports in the resolutions of the Council of Policy, C168, 22/2/1785; C166, 9/3/1784; and C177, 4/4/1788 in <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁸ See financial reports in the resolutions of the Council of Policy, C166, 9/3/1784; and C168, 22/2/1785 in <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁹ This total was calculated from the amounts in Resolutiën, 18/2/1783 in *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, pp.31-5; C168, Resolutiën, 22/2/1785, pp.174-237; and C166, Resolutiën, 9/3/1784, pp.184-214 in <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

³⁰ The total expenses were calculated by adding all the cost items together and the published totals were not used. See, *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 18/2/1783, pp.31-5.

³¹ The total expenses were calculated by adding all the cost items together and the published totals were not used. See *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1779*, Resolutiën, 7/12/1779 pp.122-4.

3.. **LOCAL MILITARY ORGANISATION: THE GARRISON AND MILITIA FORCES**

The Cape was saved from the immediate threat of invasion by the arrival of De Suffren and the French reinforcements. However, due to its value to the belligerents, the possibility of a British attack on the Cape was not to be ignored. The activities of the Council of Policy were to a great extent dominated by military matters. There was usually something relating to the war on the agenda and much consideration was given to the defence of shipping, to supporting the French ally and to maintaining a good defence posture. Cape Town was the seat of power and the most important location to be defended against warships as well as against a landward attack and its fixed defences were much improved. As it was thought that an enemy could potentially land in any of the surrounding bays and march up to Cape Town, the defence of the whole Cape peninsula received much attention and troops were stationed in False Bay (Muizenberg and Simon's Bay), Hout Bay and Kamptz Bay.

Though the military setup at the Cape was dominated by the presence of the French auxiliary troops, foreign regiments and the French Navy, the VOC military organisation at the Cape was maintained and also placed on a wartime footing. The authorities at the Cape moreover warned that an enemy could appear any day, and the population therefore had to remain vigilant.³²

3.1. **The Cape Garrison and its Command Organisation**

When Gordon took over the Garrison in 1780 he was very unhappy about the condition of the muskets. In November 1780 the *Heeren XVII* approved the 1200 new muskets which the Amsterdam and Zeeland *Kamers* had to provide.³³ By the end of the war the Garrison still awaited its new muskets, as the war interrupted its delivery. At the outbreak of war the infantry were approximately 440 in total, while the artillery numbered around 32.³⁴ The Garrison had to be maintained at battalion strength, consisting of at least 400 men. By June 1783 the infantry numbered 476 in total, while there were 67 artillerists and 27 full time fortification workers. The

³² CA C2286, Origineel Placaat Boek, 3/7/1781, pp.70-6.

³³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Inkomende Secreete Brieven, *Heeren XVII* – Van Plettenberg, 10/11/1780, pp.184-6.

³⁴ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1780*, Uitgaande Brieven, Van Plettenberg – *Heeren XVII*, 9/3/1780, Council of Policy – Goeveneur Generaal en de Raden, 13/11/1780 and Dagregister, 30/6/1780, pp.150, 260 and 359-60.

sailors and boats' crews numbered 169 in total³⁵ and in an emergency they were assigned to assist the artillery with the guns on the various batteries.

Generally Van Plettenberg's did not improve the military organisation during the war; in fact he often showed little understanding of it. One of the changes he made in June 1781 was to create a special cavalry life guard unit, called the *Lijfwacht te Paard*, which was created from the Garrison with one Sergeant, a Corporal and twelve troops. Horses were bought and the soldiers were equipped in the same way as the dragoons. It was emphasized that the men always had to look neat while their horses had to be well kept as they formed an armed escort for the Governor and also carried dispatches and special messages.³⁶

After the French auxiliary troops arrived at the Cape the Khoi unit (*Corps Bastaard Hottentoten*) was maintained as the government apparently did not doubt its value in military terms and was generally satisfied with the service it provided. By February 1782 the unit was under the command of Captain Munnik, with Aurret and Schiettekak as Ensigns. It appears that one of the biggest problems they had at this stage, was that members who receive permission to take leave, did not arrive back in time.³⁷ Fourteen months after its creation, due to the presence of so many foreign soldiers at the Cape and in order to save the cost of maintaining it, the Council of Policy decided on 10 June 1782 to pay-off the unit. Its members had to return to their homes and were ordered to immediately come to the Cape in the case of a general call-up or alarm.³⁸ This was in line with the principle that it was an emergency defence measure and not part of the permanent military organisation. It was also in keeping with the VOC method of raising local forces to quickly enlarge their military force and pay them off when no longer required.³⁹

Gordon was very unhappy with the military organisation at the Cape and the issue of military command and protocol. As Garrison Commander he had the substantive rank of Captain, but the Artillery Commander, Gilquin, was a Major. The command lines were unclear and in the meantime many French troops and officers were at the Cape. When the foreign regiments arrived the situation became even worse; under whose authority stood the local military establishment and the foreign troops?

³⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – *Heeren XVII*, 22/7/1783, p.515.

³⁶ C159, Resolutiën, 5/6/1781, pp.365-76, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

³⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 12/2/1782, pp.61-2.

³⁸ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 10/6/1782, p.195. See also J. de Villiers, *Hottentot-Regimente aan die Kaap*, p.11.

³⁹ R. Raben, 'Het Aziatisch Legioen' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.185.

Gordon's promotion to the rank of Colonel was confirmed on 26 March 1782 and the VOC had appointed him on a higher rank than he asked for. He was sworn in as a member of the Council of Policy and of the Council of Justice (Raad van Justisie).⁴⁰ It was the most senior rank to be bestowed on an officer at the Cape, yet it did not solve the problems regarding Gordon's authority. After the Luxemburg Regiment arrived at the Cape in May 1782 Gordon wished to know if the Luxemburg Regiment was part of the Cape Garrison and fell under his command. He also wanted to clarify the artillery issue, since he had received no reports from Gilquin. On Gordon's insistence a special Council of Policy meeting was held on 25 May 1782 and the Council again discussed the issue on 28 May. Van Plettenberg and his Council were not going to give him a clear answer and make the right military decisions. After studying the agreement between the VOC and the Prince of Luxemburg, dated 7 April 1781, Van Plettenberg reported that under the service conditions of the regiment, it fell directly under his authority.⁴¹ Regarding the artillery issue Gordon also received an ambiguous answer as Van Plettenberg thought that Gilquin should only report to Gordon concerning all things relating to military service. Gordon was not satisfied with the ability of the Governor to address the problem and asked permission to request a decision from the *Heeren XVII*.⁴² Gordon was also unhappy about his salary scale (f150 per month) and requested his salary to be equal to that of Colonel De Baudras, the Officer Commanding of the Luxemburg Regiment (f200 a month). The Council agreed and raised it to the requested level.⁴³

When the De Meuron Regiment arrived at the Cape, Gordon again addressed the issue of his authority at a meeting of the Council of Policy on 28 January 1783. He was not notified when the regiment disembarked and he wanted to know if they would fall under his command. The reply was predictable – it was under the command of the Governor.⁴⁴ However, the Waldener Legion, on its way to the East and destined to arrive at the Cape in February, would resort under Gordon's command until their departure in April 1783.⁴⁵

The command responsibilities and authority of the Garrison Commander, specifically regarding foreign regiments and control over the artillery, was not clearly defined and the Governor issued no clear orders or a duty sheet. Seemingly impatient about the situation Gordon wrote a memorandum to the Council of Policy in February 1783 and simply asked what

⁴⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 26/3/1782, p.112.

⁴¹ See the discussions in *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 25/5/1782 and Resolutiën, 28/5/1782, p.178-82.

⁴² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 25/5/1782, p.180.

⁴³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 28/5/1782, pp.181-2.

⁴⁴ CA C1280, Memoriën, Rapporten, 29/1/1783, p.28; and C164, Resolutiën, 28/1/1783, pp.76-7.

his authority was: "...welke Post mij in dit Gouvernement aanbetrouwt en opgedraagen was".⁴⁶ It appeared to him that the status his predecessors had, was somehow altered and he wished to know if the management of the whole military structure at the Cape was not his responsibility? Who would command the VOC forces at the Cape in the case of an operation? Specifically command over the Meuron Regiment was an important issue and Gordon wished to know what his future role regarding other regiments was. In essence he was unhappy about the chain of command, and asked the Governor to clarify it.

Gordon received a written answer from Van Plettenberg. As the highest authority at the Cape, defence was firstly the Governor's responsibility and he was the Commander-in-Chief in charge of all the forces. Gordon commanded the Garrison and the militia, Colonel De Meuron the Meuron Regiment and Brigadier De Conway the French troops. Only Van Plettenberg would control and coordinate the deployment of all the forces and not one of the other commanders. For all military matters the Director of Fortifications and Head of the Artillery ("Directeur der fortification" and "Chef der Arthillerij") would be under the command of the Garrison Commander ("Hoofd en Cheff der Militie"), but as far as the different batteries, the artillerists and their equipment were concerned, it was Gilquin's terrain.⁴⁷ Command over the foreign regiments would depend on their contracts with the VOC. Van Plettenberg referred the whole issue as well as Gordon's queries to the *Heeren XVII*.⁴⁸

Gordon's relations with the Council of Policy seemed to have been one of frustration. In the discussions on military issues at the time, his name is not very common and the defence debate was dominated by the French, the foreign regiments and the improvement of the fortifications. By the middle of 1784 this had a negative influence on Gordon and he wrote a letter to a highly respected friend, Hendrik Fagel, in which he included a letter (in French) to Willem V, the Prince of Orange. He explained that "these troubles" had such a negative effect on him "that if I am required to remain in my present position, I have determined to quit the service". He stressed that he would rather drive a plough than to "see this disorder any longer, which I have neither the power nor the authority to remedy".⁴⁹

From a military point of view Van Plettenberg's approach was flawed. His understanding of military command was doubtful and his suggestions too complex for effective

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ CA C1280, Memoriën, Rapporten, 18/2/1783, p.37; and C164, Resolutiën, 18/2/1783, pp.150-3.

⁴⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 25/2/1783, Van Plettenberg, Consideratiën van den onderget. ..., 25/2/1783, pp.61-4; and CA C1280, Memoriën, Rapporten, 25/2/1783, pp.52-61.

⁴⁸ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 4/3/1783, pp.71-2.

military control. His idea of how Gilquin and the artillery had to be commanded is specifically a good indication of it. Quite rightly, Van Plettenberg was the highest political authority at the Cape and as such he was responsible for defence (civilian control over the military), but the problem was that this did not include operational command. A single military commander is a crucial prerequisite for proper military command and control and when operations are conducted a single operational commander must be in command. The Governor was not the person, and he had to have a military commander. Why not Gordon?

So, by the end of the war Gordon's authority, his military status and command responsibility was still unresolved. Little information exists regarding his military tasks during the war, though much exists concerning the activities of the French troops and their efforts to improve the defences. A final answer from the *Heeren XVII* only arrived in February 1786.

3.2. The Cape Militia

The militia was called upon a number of times to assist with the defence of the Cape. After news of the war arrived on 31 March 1781, Van Plettenberg issued instructions to the Landdrosts of Stellenbosch and Swellendam to provide a monthly detachment of a 100 men from the burgher militia to perform piquet duties at the Cape. Only a few days later, on 2 April, the first burgher militia piquet from Stellenbosch was fully present at the Cape. The militia also reacted promptly to both the call-up's of 20 June and of 23 July, arriving at the Cape in numbers. The good response was much praised by the Council of Policy, yet they expressed disappointment with those "bloodaards en veragters" that did not respond and left the defence of the Cape in the hands of their fellows.⁵⁰ The Landdrosts were notified that they had to emphasise the responsibilities regarding military service to the burghers. Notwithstanding the fact that the militia lodged a number of complaints to Van Plettenberg about the way in which their military duties were organised, they always emphasised their willingness to perform military service in defence of the Cape and the promptness and diligence with which they undertook their responsibilities.⁵¹

Burgher militia members from the districts doing piquet duty at the Cape were quartered with Cape Town burghers. This soon caused unhappiness about the food and the general

⁴⁹ See the letters from Gordon to H. Fagel and Willem V, quoted in P. Cullinan, *Robert Jacob Gordon*, p.134.

⁵⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 3/7/1781, pp.96-7.

⁵¹ See the correspondence from the burgher led by Meyburg, Roos and others to Van Plettenberg, 12/2/1782 in *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 13/2/1782, p.67.

conditions under which some had to live.⁵² It appears that class distinctions played a role, as affluent burghers were quartered in surroundings, or at addresses they did not approve of. A system had to be created to quarter them in such a way that the inhabitants of Cape Town could contribute according to their ability. The solution (decided upon in October 1781) was to raise a small tax from all the inhabitants of Cape Town and those living to the west of the mountains (Stellenbosch, Drakenstein and Roodezand areas) in order to provide the militiamen on duty with a 10 Rixdollars grant per month for lodging.⁵³ The tax received a negative reaction and on 13 October 1781 members of the burgher militia appealed to Van Plettenberg to reconsider the new tax (discussed by the Council of Policy on 30 October). They stated that in the defence of the Cape they were allocated the most dangerous positions in the lines (“gevaarlijkste plaatsen”), yet, they have performed regular piquet duties for a number of months. They have provided slaves and labourers to assist with improving the fortifications, while their wagons and draught animals were used to carry the baggage and equipment of the French troops from False Bay to the Cape, without receiving payment for it. Now they were levied with a new tax to fund the call-up of the militia. In their opinion they have proven their loyalty and they requested that the tax be stopped. Furthermore, some of the burghers from the districts that were prepared to perform longer duties must be called up and quartered at the Cape.⁵⁴ The position of the Council of Policy was that the tax was reasonable and would be maintained.

In the meantime the piquet duties continued with new detachments arriving on a monthly basis.⁵⁵ The burgher cavalry fulfilled an important role in patrolling the beaches around the Cape and detachments were also stationed at Diep Rivier, Muizenberg and in Hout Bay. As a large number of troops were at the Cape and many considered the chances of another British attack on the Cape remote, several burghers doubted the need to continue with the system. By the end of 1781 some of the burghers went back to their farms before their service period ended⁵⁶ and in January 1782 many of them, with Francois Roos as their spokesman, felt that it was no longer necessary to perform these duties. Van Plettenburg did not agree, he referred to these individuals as “...meyneedige en verstoorders der algemeene rust”, that must be severely punished, and linked their actions to problems they experienced

⁵² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 18/9/1781 and 9/10/1781, pp.127-9.

⁵³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 9/10/1781, pp.129-34.

⁵⁴ In their request to Van Plettenberg (13/10/1781) the burghers provided a detailed account of the problems they faced. See *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 30/10/1781, pp.165-7.

⁵⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 11/12/1781, p.194.

with the *Patriotte*.⁵⁷ Roos and his companions were summoned to appear before the Council and had to stay at the Cape until a final decision was made. Roos, however, returned to Stellenbosch and it was decided to prosecute him for disobedience. A petition by 79 burghers from Stellenbosch and Drakenstein was then handed to the Governor by four militia officers, explaining that they were quite prepared to do their duty before the arrival of the French troops, but after that, and as a result of their pressing responsibilities on their farms and the threat to their families, it became difficult to continue with regular duties.⁵⁸

Van Plettenberg discussed the value of the militia with De Conway, who assured him that the burgher cavalry provided useful service and that the duties should be maintained.⁵⁹ The Council of Policy pondered over the matter for a while and in principle decided to keep a militia cavalry detachment on duty (exchanged monthly) as the chances of a surprise attack did exist. In the light of the decent way in which the burghers presented their case, they would not be prosecuted.⁶⁰ The Council also took note of the other burgher complaints: they had to tend to their agricultural responsibilities, from a security point of view it was difficult for some burghers to do duties, and the cost burghers incurred to maintain themselves at the Cape was high. The 10 Rixdollars they received was not even enough to properly maintain their horses as they received no income while performing these duties. To make it easier for the militia, only one male member of a family would have to do military duty at a time and persons without a household, or that could be absent from their homes for longer, could do piquet duties up to the end of the war. In addition they would receive a monthly disbursement of 20 Rixdollars⁶¹ and as a result of the unhappiness about the special tax, it was decided on 19 February that the money would come from the Company's coffers.⁶²

The burgher militia was well maintained and kept up to strength to the end of the war. When officers or NCO's died, or asked to be relieved from duty due to old age or illness, new appointments and promotions were quickly made.⁶³ Between 1782 and 1784 the yearly exercises for the militia were not held. The Council of Policy decided that yearly exercises were unnecessary as the burghers were under arms often enough, there were many troops at

⁵⁶ See for example, *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 5/1/1782, 10/1/1782 and 13/2/1782, pp.5, 19 and 73.

⁵⁷ C.V.E. Wahl, *Die Administrasie van die Kaap onder Goewerneur Van Plettenberg*, pp.31-3.
⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 18/1/1782, pp.36-7.

⁶⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 18/1/1782 and 13/2/1782, pp.34-8 and 63-77.

⁶¹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 13/2/1782, pp.63-4.

⁶² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 19/2/1782, pp.81-2.

⁶³ See for example, *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 9/7/1782 and 16/7/1782, pp.214 and 217.

the Cape and accommodation was very scarce as officers of the Pondicherry and Meuron Regiments resided in the available houses.⁶⁴

Maintaining the burgher cavalry at the Cape showed the typical difficulties experienced with the mobilisation of a part-time force or a militia. This is a common trend in the military history of South Africa, as regular military forces were usually not available and part-time forces had to be relied upon. Often soldiers did not report for duty, they quitted, or were reluctant to do very dangerous duties, while problems with discipline at times occurred. It is noteworthy that the principle of military duty was not the problem, but the duration and regularity of it was, since most of the men had other commitments, or could not be absent from home for long.

4. THE FRENCH MILITARY ORGANISATION AND THE FRENCH-DUTCH MUTUAL MILITARY SUPPORT

The French were involved with the defence of the Cape since the outbreak of war and a French warship (*Le Sylphide*) informed the Cape about war on 27 March. Soon afterwards (24 May) M. de Chevreau, the *Intendant* of Mauritius and Commissioner De Mouchy Percheron arrived with important news about French assistance to the Cape. Chevreau and Percheron then made arrangements for the reception of the French troops and naval contingent that were on its way to the Cape. Governor-General Alting in Batavia expressed his gratitude to the French for warning the Cape and trusted that the measures taken will prevent the Cape from falling into British hands. Alting stated that Batavia would provide support in the form of equipment and provisions, especially rice.⁶⁵

With the French forces present at the Cape Van Plettenberg wanted a military aide-de-camp fluent in French to assist him in his contact with the French and Ensign Wijnbergen was appointed in this capacity in June 1781.⁶⁶ The French regularly submitted requests to the Council of Policy. These requests usually had to do with military matters, logistic support to the French forces, the sailing of neutral ships from the Cape, recuperation of forces and the reception of French dignitaries.

Though the French had a representative at the Cape and a military organisation, the VOC Governor was still the highest political and military authority. It is important to distinguish

⁶⁴ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 2/9/1783, p.186.

⁶⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Aanhangsel, Alting – De Souillac, 30/9/1781, pp.119-122.

⁶⁶ C159, Resolutiën, 5/6/1781, pp.365-76, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

between French regiments deployed at the Cape and French or foreign regiments in the service of the VOC. This issue is often not clarified in histories on the period. The Marquis de Castries appointed Percheron as the official representative of the French Court and the Commissioner of the French Royal Navy at the Cape.⁶⁷ No French naval officer was stationed at the Cape to coordinate and direct naval operations. However, their logistic and supply needs were the responsibility of Percheron. The French troops that arrived with De Suffren consisted of a part of the Austrasia ("Austrasië") Regiment, the Pondicherry Regiment and some artilleryists. The auxiliary troops of the Austrasia Regiment and the artillery company that De Suffren disembarked marched from Simon's Bay on 24 June and camped at Diep River. They arrived at Cape Town by midday on 25 June "in volle ordre, met vliegende vaandels en slaande trommels".⁶⁸ The infantry were quartered in a storehouse next to the Lutheran Church and a house rented from one of the Cape burghers acted as their guard house, while the artillery bivouacked in two rented houses. Troops of the Austrasia Regiment stayed at the Cape for a short period only. The Pondicherry Regiment disembarked in Simon's Bay and marched to Cape Town on 2 July. They arrived in the town the next afternoon and were quartered in the left wing of new hospital building.⁶⁹ Initially many of the French troops became ill because some had to sleep on the floor as they did not have proper bedding and enough blankets. Van Plettenberg was reminded by the VOC representatives in France that they had to take proper care of the soldiers, provide them with bedding and ensure that the sick troops receive good medical care.⁷⁰

The Austrasia Regiment was destined for the East, while the Pondicherry Regiment stayed at the Cape for the duration of the war and only departed in April 1784. The rank-and-file of the Pondicherry Regiment were mainly Indian mercenaries or *sepoys*, commanded by French officers. In terms of troop strengths, the French in effect maintained two battalions at the Cape. By November 1781 the Pondicherry Regiment amounted to 1146 men; by April 1782 there were 1669 French soldiers at the Cape (which included soldiers on their way to Mauritius); in October 1782 it was down to 1142 men; and in April 1783 there were 1156

⁶⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Resolutiën, 28/6/1781, Castries – Cape Governor, 22/2/1781, p.95.

⁶⁸ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister, 24/06/1781 and 25/06/1781, p.252.

⁶⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1781*, Dagregister, 3/7/1781, p.254.

⁷⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Inkomende Secreete Brieven, Van de Perre and Boers – Van Plettenberg, 7/3/1782, pp.224-6.

French mercenaries at the Cape.⁷¹ With French assistance the VOC also secured the services of three mercenary regiments. (See the discussion on foreign regiments at the Cape.)

The Commanding Officer of the Royal French troops at the Cape or the “Commandant en Chef der Troupes” was Colonel (later referred to as Brigadier) Count De Conway, an Irishman in French service.⁷² De Conway had an active service record and was also wounded during the American War of Independence. The notorious French revolutionary, Paul-Francois-Jean-Nicholas Barras, who was afterwards a member of the Directorate of France and supported the early military career of Napoleon Bonaparte, was an officer in the Pondicherry Regiment.⁷³ Though Barras called his commander an anxious tyrant, he acknowledged that De Conway was an experienced and capable soldier, well versed in the military art and with sufficient diplomatic skills to appease the Dutch.⁷⁴

Van Plettenberg requested military assistance from the Governor of Mauritius, De Souillac, shortly after the outbreak of war,⁷⁵ while the French military contingent investigated the defence of the Cape and despatched a list of immediate requirements to Mauritius. The list included a request for an additional 2000 fully equipped infantrymen, 300 artilleryists, 60 guns and ammunition (18 to 36-pounders with 200 to 300 rounds per gun) as well as eight mortars (9 to 12-pounders).⁷⁶ On 15 November 1781 the first military support from Mauritius arrived at the Cape when the hooker *Catwijk aan Rijn* returned with 40 additional troops, 40 guns (32, 24 and 18-pounders), gunpowder and ammunition.⁷⁷ Though the Cape did not receive all the requested material, the support from Mauritius was highly appreciated and the High Council of Indies emphasised it to the Governor.⁷⁸

The French contribution in expanding and improving the Cape defences was invaluable. Their involvement was not restricted to the fortifications of Cape Town and they assisted with placing the whole Cape Peninsula on a more secure footing. Immediately after their arrival a number of French officers and engineers were tasked to travel around the Cape

⁷¹ G.J. Schutte, *Briefwisseling van Hendrik Swellengrebel*, p.195n; and G.A. le Roux, *Europese Oorloë en die Kaap*, p.102.

⁷² *Kaapse Archiefstukken*, 1781, Resolutiën, 28/6/1781, p.95.

⁷³ G.M. Theal, *History of Africa South of the Zambesi*, III, p.203n.

⁷⁴ A. Linder, *The Swiss Regiment Meuron*, p.35.

⁷⁵ NAN 1.01.50 – 1192, Van Plettenberg – Stadhouder, 20/4/1781; and *Kaapse Archiefstukken* 1782, II, *Secreete Particuliere Brieven*, Van Plettenberg – De Souillac, 1/4/1781, pp.252-3.

⁷⁶ H.C.V. Leibbrandt and J.E. Heeres, *Memorien van den Gouverneur Van de Graaff over de Gebeurtenissen aan De Kaap De Goede Hoop in 1780 – 1806*, pp.17-8.

⁷⁷ CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, p.22; and *Kaapse Archiefstukken* 1781, Dagregister, 15/11/1781, p.279.

⁷⁸ *Kaapse Archiefstukken* 1783, I, *Inkomende Brieven*, Goeverneur Generaal en Raad – Council of Policy, 23/10/1782, p.354.

Peninsula, survey its defences, make an analysis of its strengths and weaknesses, establish which were the possible landing sites and report on it, so that action could be taken. One of the earliest French reports ("Military Observations on the Existing Conditions of the Cape of Good Hope") was compiled in 1781 by an unknown French officer.⁷⁹ It showed remarkable insight into the defence requirements of the Cape and its author clearly had some military standing, as many of his suggestions were implemented. When the French commander De Bussy visited the Cape in 1782, he also wrote a memorandum on the defence of the Cape.⁸⁰

From the French perspective, Cape Town was a bad location to defend as it was possible to dominate the town from the mountain slopes. The whole defensive system of the Cape was inadequate and was open for attack from five points; Table Bay, the neck between Table Mountain and Lions Head, Hout Bay, False Bay and Saldanha Bay. A large amphibious landing on many of the beaches around the Cape would be easy, specifically on a calm day. They saw the answer in additional well located batteries armed with more heavy calibre guns.⁸¹ The troops that defended the Cape had to be concentrated at a central location from where it would be possible to quickly deploy them in an emergency. They also suggested that the Khoi troops, whose strength was in hit-and-run tactics, should be deployed at a location from which they could hinder the advance of an enemy.⁸² The objective of a military commander defending the Cape would be to intercept and destroy an enemy marching on Cape Town. As a result an intelligent enemy would advance on the Cape from more than one position, which would divide the defending forces and make the defence difficult.⁸³ The French valued the Muizenberg position, stating that both it and Simon's Bay should be fortified and enough infantry had to be deployed between these locations to be able to assist at either of the positions. Hout Bay was another potential landing site and an enemy advancing from there, could attack Cape Town from behind. Though Saldanha Bay was an ideal location from an operational point of view, it was impractical to land there, simply because it was too far.⁸⁴

The Cape was important for French communication with India and their war effort in the Indian Ocean. As J.P. van Braam (Commodore of the Dutch squadron) emphasised, the Cape supplied Mauritius and served as a base to France. Sick French troops and sailors

⁷⁹ For an English translation of the report entitled 'Military Observations on the Existing Conditions of the Cape of Good Hope', 1781, by an unknown French officer see A.B. Smith, 'A Report on Excavations at De Conway Redoubt', *SA Military History Journal* 5(3) 1981, pp.111-113.

⁸⁰ CA VC151, *Memorie sur la defense de la Colonie du Cap de Bonne-Esperance*. Memorandum of De Bussy on the defence of the Cape, 1782.

⁸¹ 'Military Observations on the ...', 1781, in *SA Military History Journal* 5(3) 1981, p.111.

⁸² 'Military Observations on the ...', 1781, in *SA Military History Journal* 5(3) 1981, p.113.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

recuperated, while their ships were replenished and repaired at the Cape. The fact that the French had a naval commissioner at the Cape that could maintain and manage their magazines was of great military and logistic value. When French ships arrived, they were immediately provided from these magazines, while provisions could be bought in at good prices, and stored.⁸⁵

In 1781 and 1782 French forces en route to the East regularly recuperated at the Cape. The Comte De Bussy (with the rank of Lieutenant-General and Commander of the French land and sea forces in India) arrived at the Cape on 10 April onboard the French ship of the line *St Michel* (64) with two other warships in company. The rest of his force was to follow. He was received with much honour and when he went ashore the next day, he received a 17-gun salute, Gordon and Gilquin awaited him at the jetty and a guard of honour met him at the Castle as he went to see the Governor.⁸⁶ De Bussy was in a hurry to get to Mauritius and he requested on 17 April 1782 that no ships whatsoever, be allowed to depart while he was at the Cape. Ships were only allowed to sail, three days after his departure. The Council of Policy granted the request and prohibited three Danish East Indiamen at the Cape from sailing.⁸⁷ De Bussy departed on 28 April,⁸⁸ but his force would be in a wretched condition when they reached the Cape, and had to recuperate before joining him.⁸⁹

The first vessel of De Bussy's force to arrive was the *L'Appollon* (52) on 3 May, while on 19 May a large French squadron consisting of six warships (four ships of the line and two frigates) as well as 27 transport ships, under the command of Commodore Chevalier De Peinier, arrived in False Bay. The fleet carried 4000 soldiers (including part of the Luxemburg Regiment), much equipment and war materials. They suffered many fatalities during the voyage and had about 1000 sick onboard.⁹⁰ With such a large number of French ships in False Bay and 400 men of the Khoi unit also deployed there, Simon's Bay soon experienced a shortage of dry rations.⁹¹

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ CA VC121, J.P. van Braam, *Memorien en Aanmerkingen over den Staat der Colonie en besitting Van de Nederlandsche Oost Indische Compagnie aan Caab de Goede Hoop*, December 1783 to February 1784, pp.16-22.

⁸⁶ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Dagregister, 10/4/1782 and 11/4/1782, pp.325-6.

⁸⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 18/4/1782, pp.138-40.

⁸⁸ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Dagregister, 28/4/1782, p.328.

⁸⁹ A.T. Mahan, *The influence of sea power upon history*, p.460.

⁹⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Dagregister, 3/5/1782 and 20/5/1782; and *Uitgaande Brieven*, Council of Policy – Goeverneur Generaal en de Raden, 20/5/1782, pp.330, 334-5 and 500.

⁹¹ CA C552, *Inkomende Brieven*, Ruch – Van Plettenberg, 9/6/1782, p.101 C2347, *Instructiën*, *Opdrag van J. van Plettenberg*, 1/5/1781, p.297.

De Peinier departed to Mauritius with a warship and eight transports on 8 June, while on 26 June a frigate and nine transport vessels sailed. Only then was a Danish ship in Simon's Bay allowed to continue her voyage to China.⁹² The bulk of the warships (four ships of the line) and transport vessels, only departed to Mauritius on 8 August 1782. Some of the sick troops of the Le Marcq Regiment that first had to recuperate were shipped to Mauritius in November 1782, while the last 120 men were only shipped out in February 1783.⁹³

In April 1782 the VOC ships *Indiaan* and *Batavia* were tasked to take provisions to Mauritius in convoy with five French warships (including *St Michel* with De Bussy onboard) and a transport vessel. Before they departed the crew of the *Indiaan* refused to obey orders and prepare the ship for sea as they feared they might be pressed into French service. A detachment soldiers from the Castle immediately boarded the ship and established order. The main culprits were arrested and eight seamen were pressed into the French Navy.⁹⁴ The squadron departed on 28 April, but it was not a good voyage for the VOC: in a terrible gale in the vicinity of Cape Agulhas, *Batavia* took in so much water that she had to return to the Cape, while the *Indiaan* never arrived at Mauritius. She presumably perished at sea with all hands.⁹⁵

After De Bussy arrived in Mauritius he urgently requested additional provisions from the Cape. He made it clear that the French were acting in defence of the VOC possessions in the East and that it would be a sad day if they were not able to continue the struggle due to a lack of provisions. Despite local shortages due to the war, the Council of Policy resolved to provision the French forces as best as possible.⁹⁶ During 1782 a number of other VOC ships like the *Morgenster*, *Amsterdam*, *Jagtrust*, *Catwijk aan Rijn*, *Batavia* and *de Herstelder* were involved in ferrying provisions and equipment to Mauritius. Some of the ships returned with palisades for the Cape defences. De Bussy expressed his gratitude for the support.⁹⁷ In this way the VOC contributed much to the greater war effort and the defence of the Cape. The Dutch possessions were threatened by the British, while French efforts in the Indian Ocean forced the British to concentrate their resources and focus on the defence of India.

⁹² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Dagregister, 6/6/1782 and 26/6/1782, pp.339 and 341-2.

⁹³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Dagregister, 6/6/1782 and Resolutiën, 10/11/1782, pp.279 and 348; as well as *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – *Heeren XVII*, 17/2/1783, p.454.

⁹⁴ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 25/4/1782, pp.153-5.

⁹⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Dagregister, 28/4/1781, 15/5/1781 and 24/8/1782; as well as *Uitgaande Brieven*, Van Plettenberg – *Heeren XVII*, 14/12/1782, pp.328, 333, 351 and 532.

⁹⁶ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 27/8/1782, pp.230-4.

⁹⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Dagregister, 24/8/1782 and *Uitgaande Brieven*, Van Plettenberg – Goeverneur Generaal en Raad, 19/6/1782, pp.351 and 505.

In general the Dutch realised that French military support was crucial to the security of the Cape. Van de Perre and Boers wrote to Van Plettenberg that the Dutch Republic and the VOC should be extremely grateful towards France for their military assistance and the Cape must do their utmost to support the French in the Indian Ocean and provide provisions at reasonable prices.⁹⁸ As an unknown letter writer added; if it was not for so much French insistence and assistance, the Cape Government would not have improved the defences.⁹⁹

5. FOREIGN REGIMENTS IN THE SERVICE OF THE VOC AT THE CAPE

Due to the urgent requirement for reinforcing the defence of VOC establishments, the VOC asked the French to assist them with the recruitment of troops.¹⁰⁰ As a result the VOC deputation in Paris concluded contracts for 2830 mercenaries from the Luxembourg Regiment, the De Meuron Regiment and the Legion of the Baron of Waldener during 1781. The Hesse-Darmstadt Regiment (2000 troops) was also available for service in the East, while a certain German Elector (with an illegible name) offered the VOC 1000 men, not equipped and unarmed, to be delivered at Nijmegen on the Dutch border. Both these offers were declined.¹⁰¹ The difficult task of getting the troops to the Cape and the East in wartime (with no regular VOC convoys sailing) was the responsibility of the Committee for Secret Affairs. The French assisted and early in 1782 special arrangements were made to despatch the soldiers.¹⁰² However, the process was arduous and many soldiers died during the voyage to the Cape, which was typical of the difficulties states faced when they had to move large bodies of troops across the oceans in the eighteenth century.

The contracts with the regiments were not cheap and were calculated on a tariff per soldier. Special agreements were concluded with the officers. Before departure officers received an allowance to equip themselves, they also received a monthly salary, a gratuity (equivalent to a year's salary) was paid out at the end of their commission period and they were compensated for wounds or the loss of a limb.¹⁰³ Soldiers received equipment and a

⁹⁸ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Inkomende Secreete Brieven, Van de Perre and Boers – Van Plettenberg, 7/3/1782, pp.224-6.

⁹⁹ *Briefwisseling van Hendrik Swellengrebel*, Unknown (possibly J.J. le Sueur) – Swellengrebel, 26/5/1782, p.146.

¹⁰⁰ NAN VOC4537, Geheime Commissie – Goeverneur van de Kaap, 4/5/1781.

¹⁰¹ NAN VOC4536, Rapport van de bewindhebber J. Graafland aan de *Heeren XVII* betreffende de verrichtingen van de secrete committee, 10/4/1782.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ NAN VOC4711, Militaire capitulaties van de regimenten Luxembourg, De Meuron, Waldener, Württemberg en Sternbach, in dienst van de VOC, 1781-1801.

uniform (which was replaced after two years), they had to provide their own food (from their salary and a food allowance), buy additional uniform pieces and if they lost equipment it was replaced at their cost. Regimental expenditures and money-matters were meticulously documented.¹⁰⁴

The Zeeland *Kamer* of the VOC had to manage and control all matters pertaining to the cost of equipment and recruitment of the foreign regiments because they had very little debt, while the others were financially in a much more difficult position. The cost of hiring the above regiments (the Luxemburg, De Meuron and Waldener) was about f500 000 and the Zeeland *Kamer* eventually carried a quarter of the total cost.¹⁰⁵ The foreign soldiers and units (including the soldiers in French service) that served at the Cape during the war were as follows:

Table 4: French and Foreign Regiments at the Cape, 1781-84 ¹⁰⁶			
Name of Regiment	Size of Regiment	Arrival	Departure
Austrasia Regiment	n/a 1 Batt.	June 1781	n/a – middle 1782
Pondicherry Regiment	1200	July 1781	April 1784
Luxemburg Regiment	1100	May 1782	February 1783
Waldener Legion	400	February 1783	April 1783
De Meuron Regiment	1120	February 1783	February 1788

5.1. The Luxemburg Regiment

On 7 April 1781 the VOC representatives in Paris signed a service agreement with the Luxemburg Regiment to provide 1100 men plus officers. To the frustration of Van de Perre and Boers, the Luxemburg Regiment had not yet departed by early 1782, as the French were not in a hurry to move the troops to Brest, ships were not yet equipped and the regiment would have to share ship space with French troops and equipment. Because of the French laxness (“willekeurige behandelingen, en daaruit voortgevloeide disorders...”), Van de Perre and Boers

¹⁰⁴ A. Linder, *Swiss Regiment Meuron*, p.43.

¹⁰⁵ F.S. Gaastra, “Sware continuerende Lasten ...” in G. Knaap and G. Teitler, *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, pp.99-100.

¹⁰⁶ Information compiled from the Dagregisters in *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I and *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I; F.S. Gaastra, “Sware continuerende Lasten ...” in G. Knaap and G. Teitler, *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.100 as well as G.J. Schutte, *Briefwisseling van Hendrik Swellengrebel*, p.195n.

approached De Castries for assistance and soon afterwards the Luxemburg Regiment embarked for the Cape.¹⁰⁷

The biggest portion of the regiment (952 men) departed from Brest onboard the large French convoy under the command of De Peinier on 12 February 1782.¹⁰⁸ The first ship to arrive at the Cape was *L'Apollon* on 3 May with 400 men of the Luxemburg Regiment onboard. It was a disastrous voyage: 60 men had died while another 200 were taken ill.¹⁰⁹ More soldiers of the regiment arrived in False Bay on 19 May onboard *Le Mars*, *Le Jeune Heloise*, *Tobie* and *Drake*,¹¹⁰ while soldiers still in France were destined to depart with the other two regiments in VOC service.¹¹¹ This only happened much later.

The Cape only received notice that the regiment would soon arrive in March 1782. Depending on the security situation, the Governor had to decide if the regiment would stay at the Cape or go to Ceylon.¹¹² Van Plettenberg did not want to make the decision on his own and formed a *Krijgsraad* (Council of War) that consisted of Gordon, Gilquin and the senior French military commanders. They decided on 27 March to keep the regiment at the Cape.¹¹³

The Committee for Secret Affairs instructed Van Plettenberg to accommodate the Luxemburg Regiment at the *Chavonnes Battery* and the other batteries, in the storehouses and in rented buildings. Detachments of 50 men each had to be placed at Muizenberg, Hout Bay, the Schuur (Groote Schuur) and some also had to camp above Cape Town.¹¹⁴ The Council of Policy initially decided to lodge the regiment in a part of the new hospital, but the warehouse which lodged the Austrasia Regiment, was later acquired as a barracks.¹¹⁵

The Luxemburg Regiment brought its own weapons and equipment which included muskets, four field-guns, gun-carriages, gunpowder, ammunition, fuses and other equipment (spades, tents, axes, etc).¹¹⁶ The equipment was disembarked in Simon's Bay and the VOC ship *Amsterdam* brought it, as well as the luggage of the officers, to Cape Town.¹¹⁷ The

¹⁰⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Inkomende Secreete Brieven, Van de Perre and Boers – Van Plettenberg, 8/2/1782 and 9/2/1782, pp.221-4.

¹⁰⁸ NAN VOC4536, Rapport van de bewindhebber J. Graafland ... secreete committee, 10/4/1782.

¹⁰⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Dagregister, 3/5/1782, p.330.

¹¹⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Dagregister, 20/5/1782 and Resolutiën, 16/7/1782, pp.215 and 334-5.

¹¹¹ NAN VOC4536, Rapport van de bewindhebber J. Graafland ... secreete committee, 10/4/1782.

¹¹² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Inkomende Secreete Brieven, Van de Perre and Boers – Van Plettenberg, 15/12/1781, pp.219-20.

¹¹³ NAN VOC4298, Extract resolutie van de kreygsraad aan de Caab over de destinatie van't regiment van Luxemburg, 27/3/1782, pp.592-3.

¹¹⁴ NAN VOC4537, Plan voor de inkwartiering ... Luxembourg, 4/4/1781.

¹¹⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 2/4/1782 and 7/5/1782, pp.118 and 160.

¹¹⁶ NAN VOC4537, Plan voor de inkwartiering ... Luxembourg, 4/4/1781.

¹¹⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 7/6/1782, pp.186-7.

regiment's muskets were of a poor quality and though repairs were made at the armaments workshops of the VOC, when the regiment departed the French in Mauritius were requested to assist or to replace the muskets.¹¹⁸

Desertion was a common occurrence amongst eighteenth century soldiers and sailors. With the French soldiers at the Cape it was no different. When soldiers of the Pondicherry and Luxemburg Regiments deserted on 8 December 1782, they were pursued by a commando of the burgher militia and all were captured the next day. Only one artilleryman was wounded when resisting arrest.¹¹⁹

In a secret letter to Van Plettenberg Van de Perre and Boers suggested that due to the British threat to Ceylon the regiment should be shipped to Ceylon at the first opportunity.¹²⁰ As the French concentrated their effort in India, the French ships which transported the regiment departed to Mauritius as soon as they could and the VOC had to transport the regiment to Ceylon.¹²¹ Sufficient ships were not available, but after the arrival of the VOC ships equipped for war the *Krijgsraad* decided in December 1782 to despatch the whole Luxemburg Regiment with the four largest ships.¹²²

These ships were in a poor condition and their voyage to the Cape had resulted in many fatalities; a severe blow to the VOC since it had an urgent requirement for soldiers and sailors. Much was done at the Cape to equip and provision these ships properly and they had to sail via Mauritius to gain intelligence and further orders first, and then to Ceylon.¹²³ The 683 able bodied men of the Luxemburg Regiment destined for Ceylon, held a revue parade on 1 February and boarded the *Holland*, *Ganges*, *Voorberg* and *Zeeuw* soon afterwards. They departed on 10 February 1783.¹²⁴

On 16 November 1783 the Marquis De Longuerue Chevalier Le Clerq, Colonel of the Luxemburg Regiment, arrived from France with reinforcements for the Luxemburg Regiment (seven officers, 28 NCO's and 261 men) on *L'Esperance de la Paix*. Seven soldiers had died during the voyage and as these soldiers (and soldiers from the other regiments) were in a "zeer Swacke toestand" when they arrived, special bungalows were erected for the sick so that they could recuperate quickly in the Cape's healthy climate ("frisse lugt") and be shipped to the East

¹¹⁸ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 24/12/1782, pp.302-3.

¹¹⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Dagregister, 8/12/1782 and 9/12/1782, pp.371-2.

¹²⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Inkomende Secreete Brieven, Van de Perre and Boers – Van Plettenberg, 9/2/1782, pp.223-4.

¹²¹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 25/9/1782, p.244.

¹²² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Resolutiën, 24/12/1782, pp.299-303.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

as soon as possible.¹²⁵ As a result of the special measures, the troops recuperated well and a month later they were ready to be shipped off to Ceylon in the *Catwijk aan Rijn*.¹²⁶

5.2. The Legion of Waldener

The Legion of the Baron of Waldener was contracted for service in the East by the VOC representatives in Paris. It was not a regiment, as it is often referred too, but was of battalion strength (with about 400 men).¹²⁷ The first 311 officers and men of the Waldener Legion departed from La Rochelle onboard *Le Louis Francois* and *Le Héros*, as part of a convoy, in September 1782. By the time the soldiers arrived at the Cape in February 1783 altogether 38 had died at sea, while 33 were hospitalized.¹²⁸ On 21 October 1783 another 64 men of the Waldener Legion arrived at the Cape onboard the ship *Le Harmonie*, while three died during the voyage.¹²⁹

The Waldener Legion was under Gordon's authority until they had to leave for Batavia.¹³⁰ They encamped at Diep River where they could recuperate and train. By deploying them between False Bay and the Cape, they provided protection against an enemy landing in False Bay. As Cloete remarked after the arrival of the Waldener troops; "... dus weemeld de Caab van Weerbare Mannen".¹³¹

By late March 1783 most of the men were in good health and ready to be shipped out. The quick recovery of the troops was ascribed to the climate and good exercise: "dagelijx in haare militaire exercitiën geoeffend en daarbij door de frisse lugt ...".¹³² On 31 March the legion participated in a large revue parade at the Cape and the next day they boarded the

¹²⁴ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Dagregister, 1/2/1783 and Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Heeren XVII, 17/2/1783, pp.278 and 454.

¹²⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Dagregister, 21/10/1783 and Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Goeverneur Generaal en Raden, 26/11/1783, pp.331 and 567.

¹²⁶ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Heeren XVII, 20/12/1783, p.578.

¹²⁷ NAN VOC4536, Rapport van de bewindhebber J. Graafland ... secrete committee, 10/4/1782.

¹²⁸ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Dagregister, 3/2/1783, p.279.

¹²⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Dagregister, 21/10/1783 and Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Goeverneur Generaal en Raden, 26/11/1783, pp.331 and 567.

¹³⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 2/2/1783 and Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Goeverneur Generaal en Raden, 13/2/1783, pp.29 and 453.

¹³¹ *Briefwisseling van Hendrik Swellengrebel*, Caabsche Nouvelles van't Jaar 1781, Cloete – Swellengrebel (undated and unsigned), p.194.

¹³² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Goeverneur Generaal en Raad, 22/3/1783, p.462.

Schoonderloo, Bodt and Zeepaard. The ships eventually departed on 11 April 1783.¹³³ The 74 men of the legion, who were too ill for the long voyage, sailed with the *Java* which left for Batavia in May.¹³⁴ Reinforcements for the legion that had arrived in the meantime sailed with the *Ouwerkerk* at the end of the year.¹³⁵

5.3. The Regiment De Meuron

The Swiss reputation for brave and hardy soldiers was established during their struggle for freedom in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and by late mediaeval times many Swiss mercenaries were in the service of European polities. Through generations they developed a high standard of professionalism and Swiss mercenaries (the *Compagnie des Cent Suisses*) served as the bodyguard of the French Kings from 1497 to 1791. By the late eighteenth century soldiering was not as attractive to the Swiss as before and, typical of armies at the time, non-Swiss and undesirables filled the ranks of Swiss regiments at an increasing rate. In general though Swiss regiments still had a reputation for good disciplined troops and demanded a good price.¹³⁶

The Dutch representatives in Paris preferred Swiss troops to French, as Swiss soldiers had served the Dutch well in the past. They were introduced to a Swiss officer, Colonel Charles-Daniel de Meuron, who presented them with a proposal for a Swiss regiment of 1120 men.¹³⁷ A contract, which contained much detail on the equipping of a regiment and its financial management matters, was signed with De Meuron on 28 May 1781. De Meuron was both the proprietor and the Commanding Officer of the regiment.¹³⁸ He was an experienced soldier who saw much action, and was wounded twice during the Seven Years War. He served in the Swiss Guard of the King of France and resigned in 1781. At this stage he was a well known courtier with good connections, which included the powerful Duc de Choiseul.¹³⁹

¹³³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Dagregister, 31/3/1783; 1/4/1782, 2/4/1783 and 11/4/1783, pp.291, 293 and 295.

¹³⁴ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – *Heeren XVII*, 12/4/1783 and Council of Policy – Goeverneur Generaal en Raden, 6/5/1783, pp.492 and 500.

¹³⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 25/11/1783 and Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – *Heeren XVII*, 20/12/1783, pp.240 and 578.

¹³⁶ A. Linder, *The Swiss Regiment Meuron at the Cape and afterwards, 1781-1816* (Castle Military Museum, Cape Town, 2000), pp.11-2.

¹³⁷ NAN VOC4536, Rapport van de bewindhebber J. Graafland ... secrete committee, 10/4/1782.

¹³⁸ NAN 1.01.50 – 1139, Propose par le Coll^e de Meuron – pour le levé d'un regiment Suisse au Service de la Comp^e des Indes Orientales, 12/4/1781.

¹³⁹ A. Linder, *Swiss Regiment Meuron*, pp.14-6.

Recruitment immediately started and by the end of October, the date stipulated by the contract, two-thirds of the regiment's soldiers were Swiss while the rest were foreigners. Unfortunately the regiment was ravaged by small-pox between October 1781 and March 1782 and to fill the vacancies France provided 380 prisoners. This did not bode well for discipline and De Meuron soon complained that he found it difficult to discipline these men. On 3 May 1782 when the regiment took its oath of allegiance to the VOC, it was formed up in two battalions and had a small field artillery component of eight guns. They were inspected by Pierre Jean van Hoogwerf of the VOC, who expressed his satisfaction with the regiment's orderliness and general appearance.¹⁴⁰

The original plan was to embark the Meuron Regiment in December 1781, but this was delayed. First due to the smallpox, then when it was ready to be transported in May 1782, it had to await the preparations of a large number of merchant ships and the arrival of naval escorts from Rochefort. By the end of July the process of shipping the soldiers into *Le Fier*, the French frigate *L'Hermione* (32) and the East Indiaman *Naarstigheijd* commenced. The greatest part of the Meuron Regiment (735 men) was placed on an overcrowded *Le Fier*, as it also carried a cargo of 36 24-pounders and eleven 18-pounders destined for the East, as well as some of the regiment's field pieces.¹⁴¹ Before they departed a hurricane struck the anchored fleet, causing much damage and more delays. The convoy (seven transport ships and two East Indiamen) eventually sailed early in September 1782 with soldiers of the Meuron Regiment, the Legion of Waldener and the Pondicherry Regiment onboard.¹⁴² It was a difficult voyage. Rations were insufficient and they were on half rations for 80 days. Altogether 300 men suffered from scurvy and 103 died at sea, while *Le Fier* alone had 89 fatalities and 200 sick.¹⁴³ When they arrived at the Cape on 7 February 1783, the soldiers were in a "zeer Swacke toestand", and of the 53 that were hospitalised a further twenty would soon die.¹⁴⁴ The Meuron Regiment was reduced to about 850 able-bodied men.

Colonel De Meuron was very perturbed about the conditions his soldiers had to endure and wanted Van Plettenberg to take action against Captain D'Albarade of *Le Fier*. The ship was chartered by Van de Perre and Boers with the purpose of transporting the Meuron Regiment to the Cape, but it was badly provisioned and had so much illicit freight onboard that

¹⁴⁰ A. Linder, *Swiss Regiment Meuron*, pp.21-5.

¹⁴¹ NAN VOC4536, Rapport van de bewindhebber J. Graafland ... secrete committee, 10/4/1782.

¹⁴² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Dagregister, 3/2/1783 and 7/2/1783, pp.279-80.

¹⁴³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Goeverneur Generaal en Raad, 13/2/1783, p.453.

little space remained for the regiment's equipment and much had to be left behind. Conditions onboard were extremely cramped and combined with the insufficient rations, it caused illness and fatalities. The Governor was also perturbed about the situation and the Independent Fiscal thought *Le Fier* had acted in contradiction to the agreement. De Conway even placed a 25 man French guard on the vessel. On 25 March the French had the guard removed, as it was considered an insult to the French Flag and as a result of a request from Percheron, the Council of Policy decided not to continue with judicial proceedings, referring the matter to the VOC.¹⁴⁵ De Meuron was not prepared to let it rest and again requested Van Plettenberg to arrest D'Albarade and prevent him from escaping.¹⁴⁶ The Council of Policy refused, stating it was a matter between the VOC and the shipping company and they suggested that De Meuron direct his complaints to the VOC. He did exactly that, and claimed much compensation. Yet, in the end he would only receive a small portion of the claim (close to half a million Guilders) and had to renounce any further claims.¹⁴⁷

The Meuron Regiment had to replace the Luxemburg Regiment that had left for Ceylon. Barrack conditions were Spartan and they were unhappy about the insufficient facilities (troops had to sleep on the floor) as well as the quality and quantity of the bread they received. There was a shortage of wheat at the Cape, due to the presence of so many foreign troops and everything was very expensive. The regiment's bread ration was nonetheless increased and Gordon looked into the other complaints.¹⁴⁸

The Governor exercised control over the regiment, as De Meuron reported directly to him. Organisationally the regiment consisted of two battalions and ten companies. As Regimental Commander De Meuron did not have a company, but exercised control over the whole regiment. He maintained high standards regarding discipline, training and the physical fitness of his soldiers. Discipline was harsh (caning being common) and the regiment was subject to constant drill and training. They received their orders on the parade ground in Dutch and initially it had to be translated into French. On Friday 28 March 1783 the regiment held a revue parade for the Governor. In full dress uniform with their banners flying, they showed off

¹⁴⁴ A. Linder, *Swiss Regiment Meuron*, pp.26-29. See also *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Goeverneur Generaal en Raad, 26/11/1783, pp.567-8.

¹⁴⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 26/3/1783 and 31/3/1783, pp.102-9.

¹⁴⁶ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 8/4/1783 and De Meuron – Van Plettenberg, 8/4/1783, pp.113-5.

¹⁴⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 25/2/1783, 11/3/1783 and 8/4/1783, pp. 53, 84-5 and 113-5.

¹⁴⁸ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 29/4/1783, pp.126-8.

their skill and equipment.¹⁴⁹ By 2 April 1783 the regiment mustered 985 men (including 48 officers) while they had to be at least 1100 strong.¹⁵⁰ Reinforcements were on their way and the *l'Harmonie* arrived from Rochefort on 21 October 1783 with two officers, seven NCO's and 49 men of the Meuron Regiment onboard. Four soldiers had died during the voyage.¹⁵¹

Soon after their arrival thirty French soldiers (some of them former prisoners) deserted. They were quickly apprehended and were roughly treated (one died a few days later).¹⁵² Twelve of these soldiers were deemed untrustworthy ("onvertrouwbaar") and were banished to serve in the VOC Garrison in Batavia, while the VOC transferred an equal number of recruits to the regiment.¹⁵³ When six men of the Meuron Regiment were found guilty of fraud after illicitly copying the paper money in circulation at the Cape in August 1783, one had to be executed (hanged) in public in accordance with Swiss Law. The Meuron Regiment formed up behind their standards on the Parade, in the presence of a large crowd that had gathered ("toevloed van een Considerable meenigte aanschouwers"). The principle offender was executed on the gallows while the other five was lashed, branded as thieves and banned to perform hard labour on Robben Island.¹⁵⁴

De Conway was not impressed by the way De Meuron dealt out punishment and complained to the VOC about the harsh treatment these soldiers received. De Meuron explained that it was done according with old and respected Swiss laws. Much tension also existed between the officers of the Pondicherry and Meuron regiments. When detachments of the Meuron Regiment marched from their barrack to the Parade, they passed the barracks of the Pondicherry Regiment, whose soldiers on guard duty would insult them by not saluting their colours. Such differences even caused duels amongst regimental officers.¹⁵⁵

At the end of the war, the Meuron Regiment was still at the Cape. They were eventually shipped to Colombo in 1788. There can be no doubt that it was a crack regiment in the best European military traditions of the day, as De Meuron was an experienced soldier with

¹⁴⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 2/2/1783 and Dagregister, 28/3/1783, pp.29 and 291.

¹⁵⁰ H.C.V. Leibbrandt and J.E. Heeres, *Memorien van den Gouverneur Van de Graaff over de Gebeurtenissen aan De Kaap De Goede Hoop in 1780 – 1806*, p.19n.

¹⁵¹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Dagregister, 21/10/1783 and Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Governor Generaal and Council, 26/11/1783, pp.331 and 567.

¹⁵² A. Linder, *Swiss Regiment Meuron*, p.29.

¹⁵³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 25/3/1783 and 22/7/1783 and Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Governor-Generaal, 30/7/1783, pp.96, 167 and 535.

¹⁵⁴ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Dagregister, 29/8/1783, p.321.

¹⁵⁵ A. Linder, *Swiss Regiment Meuron*, pp.34-5.

high standards that had served in elite units. Discipline was harsh and its officers paid much attention to maintaining the regiment properly.

6. EXPANSION OF THE FORTIFICATIONS OF THE CAPE

The French considered fixed defences as an important element in defence and emphasised that the fixed defences of Cape Town was severely lacking; the city had too few heavy guns and needed more well located batteries. They then set out to address it¹⁵⁶ and forty guns with a large supply of ammunition arrived from Mauritius in November 1781. French engineers and the capable Major Gilquin worked together to expand and improve the fortifications around Cape Town and the Peninsula, but as it was very expensive and there was not enough time to create strong permanent defences, many of the temporary fortifications, created with the idea that they would only serve for the duration of the war, were still temporary years later.

Table 5: Cost of Fortifications at the Cape, 1780 to 1784¹⁵⁷

Financial Year	Expenditure
1779-80	f9870:09
1780-81	f15087:11:-
1781-82	f63552:14:-
1782-83	f136264:18:8
1783-84	f202308:10:-
1784-85	f182370:13:08

Creating proper fortifications were expensive and after the war broke out, the cost of fortifications immediately rose drastically (see Table 5). By the last year of the war, 1783-84, it was more than thirty times the amount spent on it in 1778-79, just before the outbreak of the war (f202308:10:-compared to f6355). But the extra expenses were not only due to improvements

(material and higher labour cost) as much more firing exercises also took place. Some of the expensive items purchased (palisades and wood from Mauritius), were used in the construction of new batteries and the French Lines. Despite the cost being less in 1784-85 after the war ended, many of the expensive items ordered during the war (for example palisades), still had to be paid.¹⁵⁸

Slave labour was very important for the work on the fortifications and extra slaves were hired to assist. The VOC paid poorly and slave owners started to withdraw many of their

¹⁵⁶ 'Military Observations on the ...', 1781, in *SA Military History Journal* 5(3) 1981, p.111.

¹⁵⁷ See annual financial reports in the resolutions of the Council of Policy, C158, 16/12/1780; C160, 18/12/1781; C164, 18/2/1783; C166, 9/3/1784; C168, 22/2/1785; and C171, 4/4/1786 in <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁵⁸ See resolutions of the Council of Policy, C164, 18/2/1783; C166, 9/3/1784; C168, 22/2/1785; and C171, 4/4/1786 in <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

slaves as it was considered unprofitable to provide slaves to the Company. Gilquin complained to Van Plettenberg in April 1783 that urgent work was not progressing according to plan as he had less than 60 slaves left of the original 250, and numbers were still dropping.¹⁵⁹ The Council of Policy decided to pay slave owners better and more quarry workers were also employed to break more stone. When the Pondicherry Regiment departed in 1784, it left many gaps in terms of the military duties it used to perform. Gilquin requested additional artisans and a greater workforce because much of the maintenance on the 250 operational gun carriages and on the various batteries were done with the assistance of the regiment. He received 25 extra slaves.¹⁶⁰

The fortifications never had to stand against a direct attack from enemy warships, yet they were a deterrent to any would-be attacker and it is not clear if Johnstone planned to land in Table Bay or somewhere else. Thanks to the antics of *Equipagemeester* Staring and Captain Fuglede, the gunners had an opportunity to demonstrate their crack gunnery when they quickly fired 84 rounds at *t'Casteel van Dansburg*.¹⁶¹ They were also quick to fire warning shots to ships not showing colours, or to prevent ships from entering the roadstead at night. When the two Dutch frigates *Brunswijk* and *Jason* were at anchor in the bay on 20 March 1783, a Danish ship not showing colours tried in vain to enter the anchorage in a strong south-easterly gale and both frigates as well as the *Chavonnes Battery* were quick to fire warning shots at her.¹⁶² The value of the fortifications in Table Bay was obvious as Van Plettenberg was very anxious about ships lying unprotected in Simon's Bay after the French fleet departed in the middle of 1782. As Simon's Bay had no defence the *Amsterdam*, at anchor in the bay, was immediately ordered to Table Bay to be under the protection of the fortifications, despite the fact that it was winter.¹⁶³

6.1. Fixed Defences: From the Castle to the Mouth of the Salt River

The French were not impressed with the Castle or the ravelins and redoubts around it. It was badly built, of unsound construction and not an important position in the defence of the Cape.

¹⁵⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 22/4/1783 and Gilquin – Van Plettenberg, 21/4/1783, pp.120-4.

¹⁶⁰ C166, Resolutiën, 2/3/1784, Gilquin – Van Plettenberg, 23/2/1784, pp.153-83, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁶¹ See a copy of the report on gunnery by R.J. Gordon to the Council of Policy, 21/9/1793 in C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, II, pp.87-90.

¹⁶² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Dagregister, 20/3/1783, pp.289.

They even thought that batteries with heavy calibre guns on the slopes of Devil's Peak would be able to subdue the Castle in less than 24 hours.¹⁶⁴ The *Couvre Face Imhoff* however was important and it was repaired and improved upon by increasing the height of its parapets.¹⁶⁵

The Sea Lines were also strengthened with the French guns from Mauritius, but with three 18-pounders the "little star fort", *Fort Knokke*, was insignificant in the French view. They completely repaired and improved *Fort Knokke* and added three 36-pounders in 1782.¹⁶⁶ Yet, Gordon still considered the Sea Lines too weak and *Fort Knokke* inadequate for the proper protection of the left flank.¹⁶⁷

The stretch between the mouth of the Salt River and *Fort Knokke* was rather vulnerable to amphibious landings and had to be defended in the French view. The derelict *Nieuwe Battery* at the mouth of the Salt River was repaired in 1782 and as it was open to an attack from the rear, another battery, the *Intermediare Battery*, was erected next to it.¹⁶⁸ These batteries were armed with four 18-pounders and eight 12-pounders¹⁶⁹ and though they were only barbette batteries, warships would have difficulty firing at them as the water in front of them was very shallow with a rolling swell. They therefore acted as a deterrent to amphibious landings on the beach, in this part of the bay.¹⁷⁰

6.2. Fixed Defences: The French Lines

As the Salt River was small and fordable, the French considered a landing on the beach, to the north of its mouth possible. A resolute enemy landing there would be able to take all the batteries in the flank and then attack the Castle and Cape Town. In such an event the defending troops would have to form up to the north-east of the town and oppose an invading force by fighting for every piece of ground. Furthermore, it was possible to dominate the town and Castle from the mountain slopes and as a result an entrenchment between the sea and

¹⁶³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Uitgaande Brieven, Van Plettenberg – Goeverneur Generaal en Raad, 19/6/1782, p.506.

¹⁶⁴ 'Military Observations on the ...', 1781, in *SA Military History Journal* 5(3) 1981, pp.111-2.

¹⁶⁵ CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, pp.23-4.

¹⁶⁶ 'Military Observations on the ...', 1781, in *SA Military History Journal* 5(3) 1981, p.112; and G. de Vries and J. Hall, *The Muzzle Loading Cannon of South Africa*, p.21.

¹⁶⁷ CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, pp.24 and 26.

¹⁶⁸ CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, p.27.

¹⁶⁹ U.A. Seeman, *Fortifications of the Cape Peninsula*, p.42; and G. de Vries and J. Hall, *The Muzzle Loading Cannon of South Africa*, p.23.

¹⁷⁰ C215, Resolutiën, 2/4/1793, pp.46-143, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

the mountain was an important requirement.¹⁷¹ This was the conceptual beginning of the French Lines and due to the insistence of De Conway, work commenced on a defensive line (known as the French Lines) that stretched from *Fort Knokke* to the Roodebloem estate on the slopes of Devil's Peak.

The French Lines were essentially a series of zigzag trenches with three redoubts that had to strengthen the system of trenches. The redoubts were the *Holland Redoubt*, closest to the sea, then the *Centre Redoubt* and finally the *Burgher Redoubt*. They had masonry and earthen ramparts with a dry ditch in front and were either triangular or quadratic in shape.¹⁷² The French Lines were strengthened by strong palisades and much of the wood used in its construction, came from Mauritius.¹⁷³

When the war ended a second defensive line called *Project Retrenchement*, which ran from the Castle towards Devil's Peak, was left unfinished. It made provision for two redoubts, named *Coehoorn* and *Gordon*.¹⁷⁴ The *Gordon Battery*, at the foot of Devil's Peak, was hastily erected during the war with the purpose of providing cover to the plain behind the Castle. Its shortcoming was that good infantry could go round its left flank and take it from behind, which meant it was not of much value as its guns could then be used against the Castle.¹⁷⁵

6.3. Fortifications to the West of the Castle

Plans were made in 1780 to erect a large new permanent battery in Roggebaay between the *Chavonnes Battery* and the Castle on the location of 'S *Heeren Hendriks Kinderen*. Approval from the *Heeren XVII* arrived in March 1781. But the outbreak of the war, the shortage of labour and all the other important projects necessitated the immediate erection of two provisional earthen fortifications, which prevented the battery from being built.¹⁷⁶

The two provisional fortifications in Roggebaay, modelled on the *Chavonnes Battery*, consisted of the *Hooge* and *Laage* (upper and lower) batteries. They stood about 500 meters from each other and in 1781 they were armed with about seven guns (six 6-pounders guns and one 7-pounder howitzer) which was sufficient for light defence, but not really effective against ships. Furthermore, due to their firing arcs, no crossfire was possible between them and the

¹⁷¹ 'Military Observations on the ...', 1781, in *SA Military History Journal* 5(3) 1981, p.112.

¹⁷² U.A. Seeman, *Fortifications of the Cape Peninsula*, p.42; and G. de Vries and J. Hall, *The Muzzle Loading Cannon of South Africa*, p.22.

¹⁷³ F. Le Valliant, *Reize in de Binnelanden van Afrika, Langs de Kaap De Goede Hoop*, III, p.xvii.

¹⁷⁴ U.A. Seeman, *Fortifications of the Cape Peninsula*, p.48.

¹⁷⁵ C202, Resolutiën, 27/3/1792, pp.196-383, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

Chavonnes Battery.¹⁷⁷ After the arrival of French reinforcements and the guns from Mauritius, the upper battery was armed with six 24-pounders and a number of 8-pounders, while the lower battery received eight 8-pounders to deter an amphibious landing.¹⁷⁸

By 1781 the Chavonnes Battery, about 600 meters to the left of the Roggebaay batteries, was armed with sixteen 18-pounders, one 12-pounder mortar and a 7-pounder howitzer. The French regarded it as an important battery because its heavier armament was capable of damaging ships. There was also an entrenchment at Gallows Hill, behind the *Chavonnes*, armed with three 18-pounders. The French considered it a good site for a heavy battery, as it would pose a considerable threat to shipping.¹⁷⁹ Nothing, however, came from the idea.

In order to provide better protection for the entrance of Table Bay, two small barbette batteries were created to the west of the *Chavonnes Battery*. The *Kleine Battery* (at times in error referred to as *Heine*) was erected in Three Anchor Bay in 1779 and the French improved it in 1782 with two 36-pounders received from Mauritius.¹⁸⁰ The *Mouille Battery* was hastily erected in 1781 and armed with three 18-pounders. It was well-situated as ships entering the roadstead were often becalmed opposite it and they could then be put under fire from this battery.¹⁸¹ The *Mouille Battery* was strengthened with two 36-pounders (from Mauritius) and the increased range these guns provided, made it even more significant as it provided additional protection to the *Chavonnes Battery*.¹⁸² A defensive trench for infantry was erected in 1781 between the Klipkuilen and the Kerkhoven (graveyard), to provide protection against a force marching up from the west.¹⁸³

6.4. Fixed Defences around the Cape Peninsula

In order to prevent an enemy from performing amphibious landings on the Kamptz Bay beach and then attack Cape Town (via Kloofnek), Kamptz Bay received two small batteries during the war. It was temporary batteries with earthen ramparts and was probably armed with two 18-

¹⁷⁶ CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, pp.22-3.

¹⁷⁷ 'Military Observations on the ...', 1781, in *SA Military History Journal* 5(3) 1981, p.111.

¹⁷⁸ CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, pp.22-3.

¹⁷⁹ 'Military Observations on the ...', 1781, in *SA Military History Journal* 5(3) 1981, p.112.

¹⁸⁰ CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, pp.21-2.; and G. de Vries and J. Hall, *The Muzzle Loading Cannon of South Africa*, p.22.

¹⁸¹ C202, *Resolutiën*, 27/3/1792, pp.196-383, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁸² CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, pp.21-2.

¹⁸³ U.A. Seeman, *Fortifications of the Cape Peninsula*, p.42; and *Military Observations on the ...*, 1781, in *SA Military History Journal* 5(3) 1981, pp.111-2..

pounders.¹⁸⁴ As the best route to Cape Town was over Kloofnek, the small stone military post (where the signalmen lived) and the approaches from Kamptz Bay had to be protected. Plans were made in 1781 to properly defend the position and an earthen embankment, with two small batteries capable of holding between three to five guns, was erected.¹⁸⁵

Hout Bay was at least six or seven hours marching distance from Cape Town (via Constantia Neck). The French regarded the bay as a good potential landing site as an enemy advancing from there could attack Cape Town from behind. Though the Dutch created a 20-gun battery at the western corner of the bay in May 1781, it had only 8-pounders (taken from VOC ships that hid there), and heavier guns were required. With the assistance of the soldiers and engineers of the Pondicherry Regiment the battery was enhanced, while they also prepared the earthwork for the so-called East Fort.¹⁸⁶ The French also wanted to erect a battery at the beginning of the valley to fire at advancing troops, but this plan was never executed.¹⁸⁷

French troops were deployed on Constantia Neck as it was an important link in the early-warning system of the Cape and they had to signal Wynberg if an enemy advanced from Hout Bay. In 1781 the French soldiers at Constantia Neck created a battery with three guns on the neck and named it the *Conway Redoubt* in honour of their Officer Commanding.¹⁸⁸ The road between Hout Bay and Wynberg was ripped up and holes dug in it, to prevent the British from pulling artillery pieces or wagons over it.¹⁸⁹ Burgher cavalry did piquet duty in Hout Bay from January 1782 onwards and by February members of the Khoi unit were also stationed in Hout Bay.¹⁹⁰ The military post at Hout Bay was closed at the end of the war.

As Van Plettenberg emphasised to the High Council of the Indies, False Bay had no defence (“zonder eenige defentie”).¹⁹¹ The French believed that Simon’s Bay needed a strong battery and in June 1782 they erected two small temporary batteries in Simon’s Bay to provide protection to the ships of the Chevalier De Peinier – which highlighted the urgent requirement

¹⁸⁴ G. de Vries and J. Hall, *The Muzzle Loading Cannon of South Africa*, p.23.

¹⁸⁵ U.A. Seeman, *Fortifications of the Cape Peninsula*, p.42.

¹⁸⁶ A.B. Smith, ‘A Report on Excavations at De Conway Redoubt’ in *SA Military History Journal* 5(3) 1981, p.108.

¹⁸⁷ ‘Military Observations on the ...’, 1781, in *SA Military History Journal* 5(3) 1981, p.112.

¹⁸⁸ D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, pp.270-1, see also CA Map M1/934, Plan van de Hout Baaij, 1785.

¹⁸⁹ A.B. Smith, ‘A Report on Excavations at De Conway Redoubt’ in *SA Military History Journal* 5(3) 1981, p.109.

¹⁹⁰ CA C161, Resolutiën, 10/1/1782, p.84 and 12/2/1782, p.235.

¹⁹¹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, I, Uitgaande Brieven, Van Plettenberg – Goeverneur Generaal en Raad, 19/6/1782, p.506.

to fortify the bay.¹⁹² To the French Muizenberg was a crucial position and they warned that in good weather warships could approach close to coast. Five or six small traverses (“borswerings”) were erected on the road between Simon’s Town and Muizenberg to hinder an enemy’s advance. These positions were not properly armed and were essentially infantry battlements only suitable for light guns.¹⁹³ The French maintained that proper zigzag trenches had to be created at Muizenberg, while infantry must be deployed between Simon’s Town and Muizenberg, so that they could in an emergency rapidly take up position at either of these locations.¹⁹⁴

7. THE CLOSING STAGES OF THE WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH

When the war between Britain and the Dutch Republic broke out in 1780, it was not possible for Britain to wage a land campaign as she was heavily involved in North America and large scale amphibious landings on the Dutch coast would have been dangerous. Though the Dutch coast was blockaded at times, a constant blockade was also not possible, and Britain knew that the Dutch could be injured by a series of less decisive blows. Britain captured a number of Dutch trading posts, many Dutch merchantmen were taken, while the capture of the VOC ships in Saldanha Bay was such a feat that Sandwich even boasted about it in Parliament.¹⁹⁵ Within two years British actions had such a severe effect that the Dutch lost the bulk of their trade and fishing industry. The loss of trade was so decisive, according to Richmond, that it produced the “will to peace” amongst the Dutch.¹⁹⁶

In the meantime the war continued, and the Cape remained an important element in the contest for sea power and eastern empire between the big maritime powers of the day. By early 1783 a strong troop contingent was stationed at the Cape, while reinforcements were on their way to the East. At the same time the military force of the VOC reached its peak, as 13 374 soldiers were in its service, or on their way to the East in 1782.¹⁹⁷

On 1 April 1783 a military exercise and revue parade was held at the Cape in which the French troops, Cape Garrison, artillery, sailors, militia and the foreign regiments participated.

¹⁹² CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, pp.59-60.

¹⁹³ NAN 1.01.50 – 1235, Memorie concerneerende den staat van deffensie van de Caap de Goede Hoop, geformeerd door den Goeverneur Van de Graaff, in den Jaare 1787, 24/9/1787, p.29.

¹⁹⁴ ‘Military Observations on the ...’, 1781, in *SA Military History Journal* 5(3) 1981, pp.112-3.

¹⁹⁵ *The Private Papers of John, Earl of Sandwich*, IV, Memorandum by Lord Sandwich to Parliament, no date, probably 1782, p.300.

¹⁹⁶ H.W. Richmond, *Imperial Defence and Capture at Sea in War*, pp.237-8.

Each unit had to deploy at their battle stations which were as follows: the first and oldest burgher dragoon company behind the *Chavonnes Battery* on the left wing (to the west) of the town to cover the beach from there to the Castle. The Meuron Regiment deployed behind the entrenchments at the graveyard and the four burgher infantry companies next to each other, behind their standards, in Strand Street up to the Heeren Gragt. Three companies of the Garrison deployed behind the *Couvre face Imhoff* while the fourth (a grenadier company), deployed close to magazine and the storehouses of the VOC. The Pondicherry Regiment was behind the redoubts of the Sea Lines to the Salt River mouth. The second burgher cavalry company as well as the militia infantry from the districts covered the right wing at the Salt River (“de voet des windbergs na het kant van het Zoute Rivier”) and were to be deployed where required. The *Pennisten Corps* was in the Castle, the sailors manned the batteries, while the regular artillery was spread out between the various positions. The Governor took up position on the *Couvre face Imhoff* as it was in the centre and deemed the best place from where he could direct operations. It was thought that the deployment guarded the sea front well and the various units could provide cover and assistance to each other in case of an attack.¹⁹⁸

News about the end of wars, were equally important as news on the outbreak of wars. Much uncertainty existed as it was rumoured early in 1783 that an armistice was imminent. Brandt reported on 17 May 1783 that the Captain of a Prussian ship (who departed from Europe on 15 February) reported a ceasefire between Britain and the Netherlands, while a Dutch ship reported that a naval squadron (six ships under the command of J.P. van Braam) was equipped to sail to the East.¹⁹⁹ The French warship *La Surveillante* sailed from Bordeaux on 5 May 1783 with news that the peace agreement between France, United States, Spain and Britain would soon be concluded. She arrived at the Cape exactly two months later, but despite confirmation that a ceasefire between Britain and the Dutch Republic was in place, no clarity existed about a British-Dutch peace agreement.²⁰⁰

In accordance with the decision of the States-General (made in December 1782) to assist the VOC,²⁰¹ the first squadron under the command of Jacob Pieter van Braam departed from the Netherlands in 1783. They would only return three years later. Van Braam was a

¹⁹⁷ R. Raben, ‘Het Aziatisch Legioen ...’ in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.185.

¹⁹⁸ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Dagregister, 1/4/1782, pp.292-3.

¹⁹⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Inkomende Brieven, Brandt – Council of Policy, 27/5/1783, pp.374-5.

²⁰⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Governor Generaal and Council, 30/7/1783, pp.531-2.

reputable officer with extensive experience both in the Navy and the VOC, as he had served in Bengal as the *Equipagemeester*.²⁰² His squadron was a relatively strong force as it consisted of four ships of the line and three frigates and with the exception of one ship (the *Prinses Louisa*), all the ships were very new ships.²⁰³ Van Braam had the substantive rank of Captain, flew the Broad Pennant of a Commodore and carried the Dutch title *Capitein Commandeur*. He was also awarded the rank of *Ordinaris Raad van Indien* while the ships' Captains were appointed as *Extra Ordinaris Raad van Indien*.²⁰⁴ The States-General was concerned about the maintenance of the squadron, but the VOC assured them that they would provide the assistance a naval squadron required, provision the ships from VOC magazines, hospitalise the sick and supplement the crews if necessary. For command and control purposes the Captains sat on the various Councils and could participate in making important decisions. Operational issues, however, such as control of the expedition and sailing schedules, were the responsibility of the Commodore.²⁰⁵

The first ship of the squadron to arrive in Simon's Bay on 1 July 1783 was the warship *Goes* (54), commanded by Captain J.S. Stavorinus. The *Utrecht* (68), Captain J.P. Van Braam; the *Wassenaar* (64), Captain G. Oorthuys; and the *Prinses Louisa* (54), Captain F.R.C. Graaf van Rechteren, arrived the next day.²⁰⁶ The frigate *Juno* (36) under the command of Captain K.M. de Wit that sailed from the Netherlands later (5 April) arrived Simon's Bay on 1 August, while the frigate *Monnikendam* (36), Captain M. Kuyper, left Texel on 21 June with a convoy of two VOC ships and arrived in Simon's Bay on Friday 29 October.²⁰⁷ The third frigate the *Alarm*, commanded by Captain A. Spengler, only departed from Texel in August 1784 and escorted two VOC East Indiamen to Batavia.²⁰⁸

When Van Plettenberg received news of the arrival of the ships, he immediately went to Simon's Bay to visit his brother in law, Van Braam (their wives were sisters), aboard his

²⁰¹ NAN VOC11513, Extract uit het Register der Resolutiën van de Hoog Mog: Heeren Staaten Generaal der Vereenigde Nederlanden, 16/12/1782.

²⁰² J.C. de Jonge, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Zeewezen*, IV, p.689.

²⁰³ J.C. Mollema, *Geschiedenis van Nederland ter Zee*, III, p.313.

²⁰⁴ NAN 1.01.50 – 1198, Extract uit het Register der Resolutiën van de Hoog Mogenden Heeren Staten Generaal der Vereenigde Nederlanden, 16/12/1782.

²⁰⁵ NAN VOC11513, Extract uit het Register der Resolutiën van de Hoog Mog: Heeren Staaten Generaal der Vereenigde Nederlanden, 16/12/1782.

²⁰⁶ J.R. Bruijn et al, *Dutch-Asiatic shipping*, I, pp.246-7; and *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Dagregister, 2/6/1783 and 3/6/1783, pp.310-1.

²⁰⁷ CA VC120, Van Braam – Prince of Orange, 18/10/1783, pp.133-5; and *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Dagregister, 1/8/1783 and 29/10/1783, pp.316 and 333.

²⁰⁸ J.R. Bruijn et al, *Dutch-Asiatic shipping*, I, pp.246-7.

flagship.²⁰⁹ As a Dutch Flag Officer, Van Braam was received with much formal observance at the Cape. When he travelled from Simon's Bay to Cape Town, Captains De Lille and Heijden (of the Garrison) were despatched with the Governor's coach harnessed with six horses to Rondebosch to escort him to *Thuyn Huijs*. The moment he entered the town, a 17-gun salute was fired and the guard presented arms in accordance with the orders of the *Heeren XVII*.²¹⁰ Van Braam's squadron sailed to Table Bay at the end of August. When his squadron anchored on 31 August a 15-gun salute was fired from the *Couvre face Imhoff*. Van Braam went ashore on 8 September and was again received with much pomp and ceremony: a 19-gun salute was fired, he was escorted by two Captains of the garrison, a guard of honour received him at the Castle, while the Governor and the members Council of Policy awaited him at the bottom of the stairs at the *Kat*.²¹¹

One of the Dutch warships, the *Princes Louisa*, had a bad leak in her bow and needed quieter water to be caulked and repaired. She sailed to Saldanha Bay on 11 September and on Van Braam's request the East Indiamen *Amsterdam* went along to assist. After completing the repairs to the *Princes Louisa*, the two ships arrived back in Table Bay on 11 November.²¹²

In a letter that arrived at the Cape on 29 October 1783 the Stadtholder, in his capacity as Admiral General, ordered the squadron to sail for Batavia to be deployed in co-operation with the Governor-General and High Council of the Indies.²¹³ Van Plettenberg stated that the squadron was important to the Cape, as it increased the security of the Cape and bolstered the authority of the Dutch: "eene Meerdere Veiligheid te bezorgen en ... meerder ontzag voor de Hollandsche Natie".²¹⁴ Yet, both Van Plettenberg and Van Braam emphasised that there was no reason to delay the squadron at the Cape any longer and that they had to depart to the East, where their services were much needed. Van Braam asked for the equipment and supplies his squadron required to be delivered promptly. The squadron sailed to Batavia on 1 December 1783.²¹⁵ Van Braam's squadron was well received at the Cape and though the role warships played was well understood, the Dutch did not have the necessary resources earlier in the war. Naval support was crucial to the faltering VOC and this visit proved that the Cape

²⁰⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Dagregister, 2/7/1783 and 3/7/1783, pp.310-1. See also A. Staring, *Damiaan Hugo Staring*, p.33.

²¹⁰ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Dagregister, 10/7/1783, pp.312-3.

²¹¹ See *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Dagregister, 25/8/1783 to 8/9/1783, pp.320-4.

²¹² CA VC120, Van Braam – Prince of Orange, 1/10/1783, pp.125-6; and *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 16/9/1783 and Dagregister, 11/11/1783, pp.193-4 and 335.

²¹³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 29/10/1783, p.221.

²¹⁴ See correspondence between Van Braam and Van Plettenberg on 5/11/1783 in *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Inkomende Brieven and Uitgaande Brieven, pp.423 and 565-6.

²¹⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Dagregister, 27/11/1783 and 1/12/1783, pp.339-40.

could successfully support the Dutch Navy. In the East the squadron performed valuable military duties for the VOC, while they again replenished at the Cape on their return voyage.²¹⁶

The British were quick to utilise the Cape again as soon as the news that the peace process was being finalised reached the southern oceans and the East. On 8 September the British packet *Spy* arrived from St Helena to buy provisions at the Cape and to pick up prisoners of war (some were at the Cape for two and a half years) as well as the survivors of the ill-fated *Grosvenor*. The Dutch naval squadron was still at the Cape at the time and as an armistice (not a peace treaty) existed between the two states, only the Captain of the *Spy* was allowed ashore, while the ship received just enough supplies for the return voyage.²¹⁷ In November 1783 the *Content*, a British troopship en route to India was damaged at sea, and they requested permission to repair the ship in Saldanha Bay. It was granted, but as the Post Holder would not be able to control the troops, they were only allowed ashore on Schaapen Island and not on the mainland.²¹⁸ The first British warships to visit the Cape again, were the *HMS Pondicherry* and *HMS Medea*. Only their Captains were allowed ashore, and they only received provisions for the daily consumption onboard, while in the roadstead.²¹⁹

Perhaps the most important lesson to the British about the value the Cape only came at the end of the war. A British force with eight ships of the line, three smaller warships and a transport vessel under the command of Commodore Richard King departed from Madras on 2 October.²²⁰ On 30 November, when they were about 170 nautical miles south-east of the Cape, the squadron encountered a terrible storm. One of the ships of the line *HMS Africa* (64) lost all her masts, the powder magazine onboard King's flagship *HMS Hero* (74) flooded, another, *HMS Exeter* (64), was in a poor condition, "strained and worked to such a degree as to be in danger of foundering ...", while "most ships being both leaky and sickly, were in some distress...".²²¹ By the time they arrived at the Cape on 9 and 10 December 1783, they had lost 400 men at sea and about 1600 of 4747 men on King's ships were sick. King immediately sent one of his officers ashore with a request for assistance, supplies and permission to put at least 1500 of the sick men ashore.²²²

²¹⁶ J.R. Bruijn et al, *Dutch-Asiatic shipping*, I, pp.246-7.

²¹⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 8/9/1783 and 13/9/1783, pp.186-8 and 192-3.

²¹⁸ CA, C165, Resolutions, 25/11/1783, pp.269-70.

²¹⁹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 9/12/1783, p.264.

²²⁰ NAUK ADM1/54, Commodore Sir Richard King, 1783-1784, King – Stephans, 28/2/1784.

²²¹ NAUK ADM1/54, Commodore Sir Richard King, 1783-1784, King – Stephans, 18/2/1784 and 28/2/1784.

²²² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Goeverneur Generaal en de Raden, 15/12/1783, pp.573-4.

Van Plettenberg felt the safety of the Cape was his prime concern and it was not possible in such uncertain times to permit 1500 British ashore, as it would pose a big problem if the peace negotiations failed. The Council of Policy decided that they had to treat King's squadron like the *Pondicherry* and *Medea*. The ships would be provided with daily provisions, but they would not receive all their requirements at once, while the sick men were not allowed to land as only a ceasefire existed.²²³ King immediately protested to Van Plettenberg about their treatment in an adamant letter, since they represented a "Nation which had raised and protected the States of Holland". He asked permission to put his men with scurvy ashore and for his ships to be properly refreshed. It was his "duty to request a decisive immediate answer to the Demand" and as peace existed between the two states and his request was urgent "you will not hesitate to comply with such a reasonable Requisition ...".²²⁴

The Council of Policy decided for humane reasons ("menschlijkheid") to allow King to put his sick men ashore on Robben Island, or to convert one of his ships into a hospital ship, which could then stay in the anchorage as long as necessary. To provide all the victuals they needed was a problem and the British could only receive daily supplies as the Cape had a shortage of provisions and they were expecting De Suffren's squadron from India, whom they were sure King knew: "met hem heer Commandeur King niet Onbekend konde Sijn!"²²⁵ Percheron was anxious about the British presence and reminded Van Plettenberg that the provisioning of the French squadron had to receive preference. This, he was assured, would be the case.²²⁶

In the meantime the British packet *Swallow* arrived from Falmouth (on 11 December) with news of a peace treaty between France, Spain, the United States and Britain, while preliminary articles for peace were signed between the Dutch Republic and Britain.²²⁷ This softened the Dutch attitude towards the British, yet it was not the end of King's problems. His ships were shorthanded, it was difficult to transport his 1600 sick men to Robben Island, while his incomplete crews struggled to perform all their duties and conduct repairs. King reported to the Admiralty that he feared for the safety of his squadron, as the ships were in a poor state. However, he soon had naval support as another British ship of the line arrived on 22 December

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ NAUK ADM1/54, Commodore Sir Richard King, 1783-1784, King – Van Plettenberg, 9/12/1783; and *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 10/12/1783, p.265.

²²⁵ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 10/12/1783, pp.266-7.

²²⁶ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 10/12/1783, Percheron – Van Plettenberg, 9/12/1783, pp.267-9.

²²⁷ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Uitgaande Brieven, Council of Policy – Governor Generaal and Council, 15/12/1783, pp.573-4.

and during February Commodore Bickerton and six more British warships arrived at the Cape.²²⁸

King had to wait for his sick men in hospital to recuperate, which postponed his departure to 12 March 1784. But it was with one ship less, as the *Exeter* was in such a poor condition that she could not sail back to Britain. Her hull was surveyed and condemned and she was paid off. As nobody at the Cape was prepared to pay more than 300 Rixdollars for her; her masts, rigging and furniture was transferred to *Sceptre* and she was destroyed.²²⁹ Incidentally, King was in command of the *Exeter* during the first battle between Hughes and Suffren. *Exeter* bore much of the burnt of the fighting and she was badly damaged in the battle.²³⁰ So, the Cape of Storms finished work De Suffren left unfinished.

Even if they were initially received as “second rate” visitors, the Cape was a crucial stopover to King’s force and certainly saved British lives. King afterwards suggested to the Admiralty that they should appoint a resident at the Cape to arrange the provisioning of ships calling at the Cape. Judging from his vivid correspondence about his dilemma, this episode and the inherent value of the Cape for naval and military transport to and from the East, no doubt was a lesson Whitehall would have taken much notice of. As Mahan stated, the safety of maritime communications between Britain and the East and secure bases along the route, became “the main strategic outlines of the situation”.²³¹

On 6 October 1783 Admiral De Suffren, now hailed as a hero, sailed from Trincomalee for France and stopped at both Mauritius and the Cape of Good Hope. The Council of Policy decided that since De Suffren had performed such exemplary service in the defence of the Cape as well as the VOC possessions in the East, he should be received with honour and a fully furnished lodgement must be prepared for him on the expense of the VOC.²³²

The first two French ships of the line arrived at the Cape on 16 December 1783, while De Suffren’s flagship *Le Héros* arrived on 22 December. When he went ashore the next day a considerable to-do was made of it: A 17-gun salute was fired and Colonel Gordon and Major Gilquin met him at the jetty. He declined the waiting coach and walked to the Castle where the Governor and Council of Policy awaited him at the steps of the *Kat*. When he went to the special house prepared for him, a guard of honour (doubled for the occasion) saluted him,

²²⁸ NAUK ADM1/54, Commodore Sir Richard King, 1783-1784, King – Stephans, 18/2/1784 and 28/2/1784.

²²⁹ NAUK ADM1/54, Commodore Sir Richard King, 1783-1784, King – Stephans, 28/2/1784.
²³⁰ O. Warner, *Great Sea Battles*, p.124.

²³¹ A.T. Mahan, *The influence of sea power upon history*, pp.520-1.

²³² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Resolutiën, 9/12/1783, p.247.

drums ruffled and trumpets played, while the road was lined by troops of the Pondicherry Regiment with their banners flying. All this happened “uyt aanmerking der Importante diensten door zyne Excellentie in’t beschermen onzer Establisementen beweezen”.²³³ The British naval officers at the Cape also acknowledged De Suffren as a great commander and he wrote afterwards that, “the good Dutchmen have received me as their savour, but among the tributes which have most flattered me, none has given me more pleasure than the esteem and consideration testified by the English who are here”.²³⁴

The VOC and the Dutch State were extremely grateful to De Suffren for his achievements, specifically the re-conquest of Trincomalee, and he received much accolades. The VOC awarded him a special golden medallion and commissioned a bust of him from an eminent artist in Paris.²³⁵ The States-General honoured him with a very valuable sword and the VOC *Kamer* of Zeeland decided to provide him with an annual consignment of the renowned Constantia wine for the rest of his life.²³⁶ The last reward was in all probability much appreciated, as the immense enthusiasm De Suffren apparently had for the pleasures of life and the table, was on par with the zeal he displayed when attacking the British fleet!

De Suffren was a Captain when he departed from France – he returned as a Rear-Admiral. He was enthusiastically received at the French Court and the King even created an additional post, Vice-Admiral of France, especially for him. He was also honoured with the title Bailli in the Order of Malta. Unfortunately he died soon afterwards under mysterious circumstances on 8 December 1788. He was to take command of the French fleet in Brest and though he officially died of apoplexy (plausible for such a corpulent man) however, more typical of De Suffren’s unrelenting approach, he was possibly killed, or died in a duel when he refused to reinstate two relations of an important French courtier, dismissed for misconduct.²³⁷

The Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-4) was disastrous to the Dutch as it speeded up the ruin of the VOC and the eventual collapse of the Stadtholderate.²³⁸ The financial damage the

²³³ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Dagregister, 16/12/1783, 22/12/1783 and 23/12/1783, pp.343-5.

²³⁴ As quoted in A.T. Mahan, *The influence of sea power upon history*, p.465.

²³⁵ The inscription on the front side of the medallion (in Latin) was “The East India Company of the United Netherlands”, while the reverse side read “The glorious hero the honourable De Suffren, very dapper Admiral of the King of France that defended and retained the colonies, 1784”. See various papers and memos in NAN VOC11145, Klinkdicht op het afbeeldsel van de gouden Medaille door de Oostindische Maatschappij der verenigde Nederlande vereerd aan den grooten held De Suffren, 23/3/1785.

²³⁶ NAN VOC11145, Extract Resolutie genomen bij de vergadering van de *Kamer* Zeeland, 14/5/1784.

²³⁷ Suffren Saint Tropez, Pierre Andre (1729—1788), in http://88.1911encyclopedia.org/S/SU/SUFFREN_SAIN_TROPEZ_PIERRE_ANDRE_DE.htm (accessed in 2005).

²³⁸ C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch seaborne empire, 1600-1800*, p.111.

war caused to the VOC is obvious from an examination of the return fleet situation. Many of the ships of the 1781 fleet were captured, while in 1782 and in 1783, due to the fear of capture, there was no return fleet and the ships stayed in Batavia. In 1784 the VOC again had a fleet and in 1785 Van Plettenberg was Admiral of the return fleet.²³⁹

Though a ceasefire in the American War of Independence was agreed upon on 20 January 1783, the Treaty of Paris was only concluded on 3 September 1783. All the French troops at the Cape had to depart and by 12 April 1784 the last troops of the Pondicherry Regiment left after almost three years of service at the Cape.²⁴⁰ The High Council of the Indies maintained that the French assistance and the presence of French troops at the Cape safeguarded it from a British attack.²⁴¹ The Dutch were very grateful towards France, as Van de Perre and Boers stated, “De zeer gewigtige dienst, welke door het Hof van Frankryk aan de Republiek in ’t algemeen en aan de Neederlandsche Oost Indische Compagnie in het bijzonder, beweesen is, door den prompten bystand, welken het zelve aan het Gouvernement van de Kaap de Goede Hoop verleend heeft, geene andere gevoelens kunnende verwekken, dan die van de Zuiverste erkenenis ...”.²⁴²

8. CONCLUSION

Essentially the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War had two dimensions to the VOC; disaster and De Suffren. The war meant a dramatic change in the fortunes of the VOC as a number of its possessions and many richly laden VOC ships were captured. As it was close to financial ruin and lost much prestige, mostly to the EEIC, its struggle for survival had commenced. Was it not for French assistance and more specifically the contribution of the capable and ardent De Suffren, it might not have been so easy to check the British expansion at the cost of the Dutch.

Mutual French-Dutch support was a critical element of the war. French military support was crucial for the security of the Cape and it would, no doubt, not have been possible to recapture Dutch possessions (such as Trincomalee) or defend them without the French military and operational contribution. On the other hand, the French would not have been able to

²³⁹ For a complete record on Dutch homeward-bound voyages from Asia, see J.R. Bruijn et al, *Dutch-Asiatic shipping*, III.

²⁴⁰ H.C.V. Leibbrandt and J.E. Heeres, *Memorien van den Gouverneur Van de Graaff over de Gebeurtenissen aan De Kaap De Goede Hoop in 1780 – 1806*, p.18n.

²⁴¹ *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1783*, I, Inkomende Brieven, Governor Generaal and Council – Council of Policy, 18/10/1782, pp.359.

²⁴² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1782*, II, Inkomende Secreete Brieven, Van de Perre and Boers – Van Plettenberg, 7/3/1782, pp.224-7.

maintain their position in the Indian Ocean without the Cape. Van Braam emphasised that King Frederick the Great of Prussia stated success in war depended on the stomachs of your fighting forces. French military operations in the Indian Ocean depended on well provisioned soldiers and sailors and as Mauritius produced insufficient food, the Cape was strategically important to French operations in the Indian Ocean and made it possible for the French to check the British designs in the East.²⁴³ Though Van Braam stated the value of the Cape was evident from a comparison between French successes in 1781-83 and the Seven Years War, it is not that simple as a variety of strategic and other factors, such as leadership, equipment, bases, force preparation and tactics, impacted on it. Quite simply, the French also had De Suffren at sea, while on land (in India) they were inadequately prepared.

How well was the defence against maritime power projection at the Cape conducted? It succeeded during the war due to a number of factors. Firstly, because of naval forces, as De Suffren already negated the threat an invader posed at Porto Praya. British analysts were quite correct when they stated British failure in this war was due to the failed blockades of Brest and other ports and the inability of the Royal Navy to interdict or punish the French when they appeared from their ports. By preventing the French from even leaving European waters was the best defence of their overseas possessions.²⁴⁴ Without a constant naval presence at the Cape, fixed defences at the most important position (Table Bay) was important for defence against enemy warships and defence against an enemy that performed amphibious landings and marched up to attack. Consequently the fixed defences of the Cape and the peninsula were expanded; but at the end of the war it was not yet fundamental enough as many of the fortifications were still temporary fortifications. The French troops and foreign regiments were very important to the defence of the Cape. It provided a sense of security and perhaps contributed to the fact that there were no further British attempts to capture the Cape. A sufficient quantity of soldiers was important, however to ship them to the Cape was difficult and resulted in many fatalities. This fact explains why relatively small forces were engaged in colonial conflicts compared to European wars.

The American War of Independence and the associated Fourth Anglo-Dutch War had a great effect on world history as it paved the way for the French Revolution. The war also clearly demonstrated a number of tendencies. Firstly it sharpened tension in the East, forced

²⁴³ CA VC121, J.P. van Braam, *Memorien en Aanmerkingen over den Staat der Colonie en besitting Van de Nederlandsche Oost Indische Compagnie aan Caab de Goede Hoop*, December 1783 to February 1784, pp.16-22.

²⁴⁴ See the discussions in H.W. Richmond, *The Navy in India*, p.320; and H.W. Richmond, *Imperial Defence and Capture at Sea in War*, pp.185-6, 220-1 and 320-1.

the British to become extra vigilant and focus more on the defence and security of their empire in the East. As a result it highlighted the strategic value of the Cape in the struggle for eastern empire and sea power – as later events showed, this impacted much on the history of the Cape. Furthermore, it was a renewal of the Anglo-French competition but not a conclusion of the struggle and it showed that these conflicts would in future also be conducted in the East. In addition it was clear that Dutch power have waned and that the VOC did not have the power, will or ability to stand against State actors. Though the VOC realised it and did much to illicit support from the Dutch State, the war still speeded up the disintegration of the VOC.

In the final instance the war clearly illustrated the close link between trade, empire and sea power. The first two were not possible without the latter. However, sea power did not only depend on a variety of maritime resources and a strong navy, but on well located bases along the long and vulnerable routes that carried the rich trade. As this war was the only war between European powers that was predominantly decided by sea power, sea power was also crucial to the outcome of the war, and was now definitely perceived as a critical tool in contemporary diplomacy.

The war was undoubtedly a major defeat for Britain. Though Britain recovered during the war and had a few dramatic successes it was too late to change the scales in North America. In the struggle in the East, the lessons of 1781 and thereafter were clear to Britain. The fact that De Suffren sailed from the Cape to Mauritius and then to the “the Indian seas with his ships and men in the highest order” was very concerning to the British Government, to the “detriment and annoyance” of British trade and possessions as well as to the “expense and inconvenience to the Crown”.²⁴⁵ Johnstone’s failure gave the French the “vast advantage” of landing and refreshing soldiers and ships in the “mild climate” of the Cape and enabled the French to sustain their war effort in the Indian Ocean. In fact De Suffren’s operations would have been severely limited, was it not for the provisioning his force received from the Cape. The Dutch effort was thus not insignificant; by supporting the French war effort they forced the British to concentrate their forces in the defence of India, which limited the immediate threat to the VOC possessions and the Cape.

Dutch naval operations of the late eighteenth century were in accord with the resources of the country and as it became a minor European power, the main task of its navy was to protect its mercantile marine on a restricted number of routes. Dutch commercial interests were only slightly hampered during the Seven Years War, but it suffered greatly during the

²⁴⁵J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, p.238.

Fourth Anglo-Dutch War as the war became a “world-encompassing conflict”.²⁴⁶ After the war, the State would utilise its naval ability more in support of the VOC. The ineptness VOC officials showed during the war and the wholly inadequate situation the defence of the Cape were in when war broke out was probably also one of the important reasons for the appointment of a professional soldier, like Van de Graaff, as the next Governor of the Cape.

After the war Britain still valued the Cape, while being deprived of it was a problem as the example of the King squadron showed – the Cape was crucial for maintaining forces in India or for military communications between Europe and the East. At the end of the war Britain still had tremendous naval advantages; it had a large and professional navy with a secure naval organisation that was well supported by the state. Above all, its strong navy had learnt the lessons of the war well. This was not the end of the struggle, as less than a decade later in 1792, the maritime empires would become embroiled in a struggle that would last until 1815. But first, the focus will fall on the defence of the Cape during the decade of peace before the outbreak of the Wars of the French Revolution.

²⁴⁶J. R. Bruijn, *The Dutch Navy of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, p.215.

PART III
DUTCH DEFENCE EFFORTS AND A DECLINING
VOC, 1784 - 1792

*Chapter 6***BANKRUPTCY AND DEFENCE: DUTCH EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE DEFENCE OF THE CAPE, 1784-1792****1. INTRODUCTION**

After the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War a greater appreciation for the vulnerable defensive situation of the Cape, and VOC possessions in general, existed in the Netherlands and much emphasis was placed on improving it. To J.P. van Braam the master of the Cape was in an excellent position to conduct operations, and build out its power, in the East. He was therefore convinced that the Cape had to be maintained and properly defended because of its strategic location between the Indies and Europe and therefore it could be called “de Sleutel van gansch Indiën”.¹ During the 1780's the Dutch Republic financially assisted the VOC, despatched naval squadrons to the East and appointed a special Military Commission to investigate the defences of the Cape and the most important VOC possessions. Also, in an effort to place its defences on a more secure footing, the next Governor of the Cape was a professional military engineer.

Britain's former American colonies were now the independent United States and as a result, Indian empire and trade with the East became extremely important to Britain. The route via the Cape was essential for the maritime communication with the East, yet the Cape, deemed the “key” to the East and a sought-after possession amongst the maritime empires of the day, was vulnerable. Britain knew that they would have to prevent France from controlling the Cape during a next war, but the Netherlands was closely aligned with France. After the war Britain used diplomacy to achieve what they could not accomplish in war, with the result that the political alliances in Europe once again shifted and by the late 1780's the Dutch Republic was in the British camp.

The fact that the Dutch State was more involved in the defence of the VOC Empire was new in the relationship between the VOC and the State, but it was in line with the direction that the British and the French had taken decades earlier. If the Dutch State did not assist the VOC,

¹ CA VC121, J.P. Van Braam, *Memorien en Aanmerkingen over den Staat der Colonie en besitting Van de Nederlandsche Oost Indische Compagnie aan Caab de Goede Hoop*, December 1783, January-February 1784, pp.9-10, 16 and 23.

they would continue to be weak, specifically as the British were reinforcing state control over their empire. To the Dutch two things were in short supply; time and money: They had too little time to create proper defences and they also had a shortage of resources.

The defence of the Cape went the full circle: before the war it was in a poor state, war broke out and the situation was improved upon with the creation of new fortifications and foreign regiments stationed at the Cape. Yet, the situation at the Cape was badly managed, the VOC drifted into bankruptcy, and with it the defence of the Cape was once more neglected – just as war clouds were looming.

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the efforts to improve the defence of the Cape during the period of peace that followed the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War. The chapter will commence with an investigation into the international situation and the state of affairs at the Cape between the two wars. Then, it will briefly focus on perceptions regarding the defence of the Cape and issues relating to defence planning. Also an overview will be provided of the developments within the military establishment at the Cape and the expansion of its fixed defences. As this period marked the highpoint of the involvement of the Dutch State in the defence of the VOC, a discussion will finally follow on support from the State and the recommendations of the Military Commission.

2. THE EFFECT OF THE WAR AND THE DECLINE OF THE VOC

The disastrous impact the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War had on the United Provinces should not be judged lightly. It was the beginning of the end for the VOC and according to many historians the setbacks the VOC suffered during the war and its inherent military weakness, played a larger role in its final demise than the corruption and self interest of VOC officials. To state that it was destroyed by corruption is therefore an exaggeration.² In addition the war kindled the process that led to the eventual collapse of both the Stadtholder system and the Dutch regent-oligarchy.³

The war did not solve the transoceanic conflict between Britain and her maritime opponents. The fact that sea power was now a very important tool of policy stimulated a naval race and a substantial amount of warships were launched in the 1780's, as countries like Britain, the United Provinces, France, Denmark, Sweden, Naples, Portugal and Turkey increased the size of their navies. It illustrated the capability of the military-industrial complexes in the West

² V. Enthoven, 'Van Steunpilaar tot Blok aan het Been' as well as F.S. Gaastra, "Sware continuerende Lasten en groten ommeſlagh" in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indiſche Compagnie*, pp.52-3 and 100-2.

and in comparison with navies in other parts of the world, European navies were now even more decisively powerful than in the times of the great European explorations.⁴ European maritime power projection could therefore essentially only be countered by European-style defence.

In maritime defence terms, the war had two direct consequences to the Dutch: a naval expansion programme and naval assistance to the VOC. The war led to the first large-scale Dutch naval building programme since the 1690's.⁵ With the decline of its navy, the Dutch had dropped to being the sixth leading naval power by 1780. A successful warship acquisition programme was launched, and by 1785 the Dutch were in the fifth position; with the biggest navy they had during the eighteenth century.⁶ By the end of the decade the Dutch Navy was able to deploy some thirty-four ships of the line. Though some problems were experienced with the new ships, they were quickly addressed and generally the programme was a success. The following comparison (Table 6) of the French, British and Dutch ship of the line figures between 1760 and 1790 clearly illustrates the impact these warship building programme had.⁷

Table 6: Ships of the Line in the Dutch, British and French navies			
Year	United Provinces	Britain	France
1760	25	107	50
1775	11	108	75
1790	34	137	90

Regarding the second matter, naval assistance, the VOC never had to rely on the state for financial or military assistance during its first hundred and fifty years. In fact, during emergencies the VOC had provided warships and financial support to the State. The Fourth Anglo-Dutch War changed all that. Not only did the VOC lose some of its possessions to the British, but many ships were captured and it lost much money and prestige. It became difficult for the VOC to maintain its position in the Indies without State support, and they got it because trade with the East was important for the wealth of the State.⁸ Initially, they were given money, but after Britain captured a number of VOC possessions, the Republic decided to despatch a naval squadron. The squadron was only ready to sail after the secession of hostilities in 1783, yet, it still went as the State thought the VOC did not have the ability to stand on its own legs any

³ C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch seaborne empire, 1600-1800*, p.111.

⁴ J. Black, *Warfare in the Eighteenth Century*, pp.144-8.

⁵ J.C. Mollema, *Geschiedenis van Nederland ter Zee*, III, p.300.

⁶ J. Black, *Warfare in the Eighteenth Century*, pp.144-8.

⁷ J. R. Bruijn, *The Dutch Navy of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, pp.148 and 158.

longer.⁹ The first squadron (Van Braam's) made a great impression and intervened successfully in conflicts between the VOC and local rulers in Malaya. In the end, no fewer than twenty-five Dutch warships were operational in Asian waters between 1783 and 1795.¹⁰

The Fourth Anglo-Dutch War nearly annihilated the VOC's trade and ships that were not captured were laid up in harbours. In order to survive it was forced to use neutral ships, had to relax its monopolistic approach in many of its possessions and allow any one that wished to, to buy and sell. Traders from many countries grabbed the opportunity. After the war the VOC had a serious cash-flow problem and could not raise enough bridging capital. The Dutch State providing financial assistance, but by 1790 the VOC debt had accumulated to f100 million.¹¹

The strategic value of the Cape was much discussed amongst the Dutch and Van Braam (later a Director of the VOC) emphasised that a great deal of the wealth of the maritime empires depended on their territories in, and trade with the East. To Van Braam the fair Cape was the key to the Indies for the three most important maritime states and the greatest powers in the East (Britain, France and the Dutch Republic): "dat soete Colonie ... als de Sleutel van Indiën beschouwen!" Britain ambitiously wished to acquire it to become master of the Indies and they would stop at nothing to expand their commerce: "...dier bezitting hun volstrekt meesters souden gemaakt hebben en nog maaken, van Eene absolute alleen Heerschappije in de Indiën te vestigen ... voor die Ambitieuze Natie, die bij alle moogenlijke middelen hunne Commerce tragten uijt the breij".¹² Gordon had the same sentiments, and wrote that one should not believe British statements that they do not need the Cape, as the sheer number of British ships using it proved the opposite. The Cape was crucial to all nations trading with the East, while some owed much of their power to the assistance the Cape provided to their merchantmen, warships and troopships. Yet, it was so poorly defended that any European maritime power would be able to take the Cape without much effort. He warned the *Heeren XVII* that they had to jealously guard the Cape, as they would not be able to replace it.¹³ Van Braam was rather philosophical, stating that if one thing was true in their time, it is that the interest of the strongest will prevail: "... het Regt van den sterken het meest ge-Eerbiedigt Regt is...". Even the most important agreements will be nullified if it is not in their interest, while the weaker states will suffer the most: "... den

⁸ J.C. de Jonge, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Zeewezen*, IV, p.684.

⁹ J.C. Mollema, *Geschiedenis van Nederland ter Zee*, Volume III, p.313.

¹⁰ J. R. Bruijn, *The Dutch Navy of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, p.158.

¹¹ V. Enthoven, 'Van Steunpilaar tot Blok aan het Been' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, pp.52-3.

¹² CA VC121, Van Braam, *Memorien en Aanmerkingen over den Staat der Colonie*, p.51.

¹³ CA VC117, R.J. Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie over den staat van defensie van Cabo de Goede Hoop*, 1786, pp.40-1 and 44.

Swaksten altijd de Leijdende partij is".¹⁴ The VOC knew its defences were in a poor condition and that proper defence depended not only on garrisons and fixed defences, but also on naval forces to balance the defence and provide defensive depth. Its lack of vessels, however, inhibited both its defence and transport ability.¹⁵

Dutch-French relations were good after the war and in 1785 a political and commercial alliance was concluded. In the meantime the political differences between the *Patriotten* and the *Oranje* supporters in the Netherlands grew tense as the *Patriotten* were inspired by the American struggle for independence and the revolutionary ideas prevalent in France at the time. The *Patriotten* essentially represented the middle class, who wished to limit the power of the aristocracy and abolish the Stadtholderate. They relied on support from France, while the Stadtholder and his supporters received backing from Britain and Prussia. The political differences developed into unrest and became an incipient revolution, which reached a peak in 1787. Prince Willem V was forced to call on his brother-in-law, the King of Prussia, to intervene with a Prussian army to maintain order. It prevented the *Patriotten* from creating a state system in accordance with the principles of democracy and the sovereignty of the people, and though a revolution was averted, the political gap and distrust remained. Many of the *Patriotten* fled to France, where they continued the struggle, while the action of the Stadtholder was much resented.¹⁶ The association with Britain now became closer, while the political distance from France increased.

Having to make do without the Cape during the war, was a predicament to the British and they were quick to utilise it to the full again when peace was restored.¹⁷ At the same time they conducted a type of cold war against France and focussed on diplomatic efforts to conclude alliances aimed against France. During British-Dutch negotiations in 1787, Henry Dundas proposed that the Dutch cede the Cape and some possessions in the East (like Trincomalee) to Britain. The Cape, he stated, "was invaluable in the hands of a maritime power, being really and truly the key to India" as its facilities were important for any fleet passing between Europe and the East. It "should belong to Great Britain... because Great Britain only can be a useful ally of Holland".¹⁸ Furthermore, as the Dutch did not have the ability to properly defend these

¹⁴ CA VC121, Van Braam, *Memorien en Aanmerkingen over den Staat der Colonie*, pp.51-2.

¹⁵ NAN 1.01.50 – 1205, Extract uit de Resolutiën van de Heeren Staaten van Hollanden Westfriesland (10/10/1780) in Resolutie van H. Ed groot Mogd op de Missive van de Bewindhebbers der Oostindische Compagnie K^r Amsterdam nopens den Staat van Defensie der Etablissements van de zelve Comp^{ie} in Oostindien, 9/9/1784.

¹⁶ P.J.A.N. Rietbergen (ed), *A Short History of the Netherlands*, p.111.

¹⁷ CA VC121, Van Braam, *Memorien en Aanmerkingen over den Staat der Colonie*, p.27.

¹⁸ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, p.153.

settlements and their upkeep was very expensive, the British could protect them, which would be to the advantage of the Dutch.

These negotiations amounted to nothing. Soon afterwards (in April 1788), Britain and the United Provinces entered into a treaty of mutual defence. Prussia soon joined and it became a Triple Alliance. Britain pledged support to the House of Orange, while the three states would mutually assist each other in case of an attack on any one of them.¹⁹ This enhanced the British position in the East and secured the Cape. Officials in the Indies were also authorized to act in support of one another without having to wait for orders from home. This treaty later provided the pretext for British military intervention at the Cape.²⁰ However, as the security of the Cape was such a crucial factor in British policy, even if the treaty did not exist, Britain would have rushed to take the Cape the moment French troops set their boots onto Dutch soil.²¹

France was now considered an enemy and a French attack on the Cape was not regarded as impossible. In 1789 O.J. Vaillant, a Dutch naval Captain, remarked that even though they were at peace, the Cape authorities took cognisance of the fact that the French had many troops on Mauritius and that their magazines were well supplied.²² Vaillant anxiously reported late in 1789 that the French had three infantry regiments on Mauritius and even though the Austrasia Regiment had to return to Europe, it still left the Pondicherry troops and a Bourbon Regiment as garrison.²³ J.C. van der Hoop, of the Amsterdam Admiralty, gave Vaillant a very prophetic answer: at the Cape, he wrote in October 1789, they should not worry about an attack from France for 25 years or perhaps longer as France was internally divided, its government was weak and it had lost "al haar luister en invloed".²⁴ Britain was building up her strength, and he thought the Netherlands had to do the same, yet it seems that few influential Dutch decision makers shared his vision. Van der Hoop did not mention the storming of the Bastille, the importance of which was missed by many at the time. By early 1790 the situation in France, and the relationship with France, was becoming critical. As the *Patriotten* received assistance from France and an insurrection in the Netherlands seemed possible, Van der Hoop complained

¹⁹ L.C.F. Turner, 'The Cape of Good Hope and Anglo-French Rivalry, 1778-1796' in *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand*, XIV, 1966, pp166-185.

²⁰ A.J. Guy, 'British Strategy and the Cape' in P.B. Boyden, et al (eds), *"Ashes and Blood" The British Army*, I, p.34.

²¹ L.C.F. Turner, *The Cape of Good Hope and the Trafalgar Campaign*, p.121.

²² S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, Vaillant – Van der Hoop, 1/7/1789, p.176.

²³ S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, Vaillant – Van der Hoop, 27/12/1789, p.194.

²⁴ S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, Van der Hoop – Vaillant, 19/10/1789, pp.190-1.

about the lethargy and lack of unity in the Dutch government: “het gebrek aan kragt, energie en medewerkende eensgezindheid ... in ons Gouvernement ...”²⁵

In Europe, a new age was dawning, and the turmoil of the 1790's would have a fundamental influence on Europe and in fact on the history of the world. The war that resulted would hasten the process of making the VOC one with the state – a process that the VOC underwent later than the French and British companies. It was difficult for the VOC to lessen its reliance on the state and as it was becoming weaker, it lost initiative.²⁶

3. THE STATE OF AFFAIRS AT THE CAPE

As the Pondicherry Regiment was departing from the Cape in 1784, Gordon wrote to the *Heeren XVII* that the Cape was “the key to the Indies”, and one of the most important possessions in the VOC realm. Might was right for the bigger states (“het sougenaamde regt van den Sterksten”) he stated, and as some states had an penchant for power, and the military ability to control, the military establishment at the Cape had to be improved in peacetime to prevent it from being in the situation it was in when war broke out.²⁷ Gordon implored the VOC to take heed of the military warnings as it should not forget that it was with force of arms, through steel and firepower (“staal en vuur”), that it acquired its most important possessions. Forgetting this might result in the destruction of the great VOC itself. Gordon prophetically explained:

“De Heemel Verhoede, dat het dreijgende tydstip niet naby sij, waar in wy door eene soortgelyke omwenteling onse beurt den nakoming meede tot een Verschrikkelyk bewijs zullen versterkken, hoe na eene heerschappij by haar Verderff is, wanneer sy de wapenen die de fundamente van haare grootheid gevestigts hebben negligeert, en als't waaren geheel uyt het oog verliest”.²⁸

The fact that the Cape was saved by the intervention of a foreign power during the war made a deep impression on the *Heeren XVII*, specifically as the political situation in Europe did not provide any guarantees for a lasting peace. After an evaluation of the defensive needs of the Cape, they decided to station more troops at the Cape, to improve its fortifications and to appoint Cornelis Jacob van de Graaff, a military specialist, as Governor.²⁹ Van de Graaff (1734-1812) was a confidant of Prince Willem V and one of three candidates the Stadtholder

²⁵ S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, Van der Hoop – Vaillant, 27/2/1790, p.196.

²⁶ G. Teitler, ‘De Marine en de Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie’ in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.61.

²⁷ CA VC117, Gordon – *Heeren XVII*, 1/5/1784, pp.4-8.

²⁸ CA VC117, Gordon – *Heeren XVII*, 1/5/1784, p.10.

²⁹ P.J. Idenburg, *De Kaap de Goede Hoop gedurende de Laatste Jaren van het Nederlandsch Bewind*, pp.38-9.

suggested as possible successors for Van Plettenberg on 30 November 1783. Van de Graaff was a cavalryman that transferred to the engineers, held the substantive rank of Lieutenant-Colonel and was in charge of the Army service maps room. He was an established authority on fixed defences and during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War he had to investigate the improvement of the Dutch border fortifications,³⁰ a very important task because the Netherlands was often invaded, and to maintain its system of fortifications was regarded as a strategic defence imperative.

According to Van de Graaff his task at the Cape was to improve its defences, create new fortifications and place the artillery dispensation on a secure footing.³¹ Furthermore, he had to report to the Stadtholder and the VOC on the status of the fortifications and had to provision the magazines with the required ammunition. In short, the Cape had to be made into “a second Gibraltar”.³²

Van de Graaff was the first Cape Governor with a military background since M.P. de Chavonnes, but was not of the same disposition. Van de Graaff arrived at the Cape on 22 January 1785 and formally took over from Van Plettenburg on 14 February.³³ He was appointed with the exorbitant salary of f18000 per year (in comparison, a major earned f150 per month), while his son, Sebastiaan Willem Van de Graaff was also appointed as a military engineer at the Cape.³⁴ Soon after he arrived, Van de Graaff wrote to the Stadtholder that the value of the Dutch possessions in the East determined the value of the Cape and that all states with interest in the East looked desirously at the Cape: “alle andere natiën, de eenig belang in de groote Oost hebben, onmogelijk anders dan met een oog van begeerte kan worden aangezien”.³⁵ As a result he emphasised that the military establishment must be improved as proper defence against a European competitor would not be possible without it.

Even during the peace warships and troopships were regular visitors to the Cape. Van de Graaff often reported it, as well as visits of dignitaries like Admiral Hughes, Lord Macartney (Governor of Madras), General Sloper (Commander-in-Chief India) General Dalling and others,

³⁰ NAN 1.01.47.27 – 157, Memorie van C.J. van de Graaff over de vestingen Brielie en Hellevoetsluis en de middelen om dese in voldoende staat van verdediging te brengen, 1780.

³¹ H.C.V. Leibbrandt and J.E. Heeres, *Memorien van den Gouverneur Van de Graaff over de Gebeurtenissen aan De Kaap De Goede Hoop in 1780 – 1806*, pp.19-20.

³² K. Zandvliet, ‘Vestingbouw in de Oost’ in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.173.

³³ NAN 1.01.50 – 1189, Eenige Missiven van den H^r C.J. Van de Graaff Gouverneur op Cabo de Goede Hoop, Van de Graaff – Stadhouder, 10/4/1785.

³⁴ H.C.V. Leibbrandt and J.E. Heeres, *Memorien van den Gouverneur Van de Graaff*, pp.19-20.

³⁵ NAN 1.01.50 – 1189, Eenige Missiven ..., Van de Graaff – Stadhouder, 10/4/1785.

to the Stadtholder.³⁶ In fact, he was sure that with the first signs of war between the Republic and a “zekere Mogenheid” (Britain) they would dispatch a large expedition to take possession of the Cape. He later explained to the Stadtholder that if war would break out between France and Britain, the Cape would be very important to the belligerents, while Britain would not consider fighting a war in the East if they could not use the Cape.³⁷

When Britain established a convict colony in Botany Bay (Australia) it added value to the Cape. The ships with the first convict-settlers put into the Cape in November 1787 and subsequent ships also stopped-over. In November 1789 the *Guardian* bought grain and livestock at the Cape for the Botany Bay settlement. On 24 December, about 2000 kilometres from the Cape, it struck an iceberg and was severely damaged. In the ensuing chaos most of the crew boarded the four ships’ boats. Only one boat and 15 crewmembers were rescued by a French ship on 4 January 1790. The *Guardian* was presumed lost, but in an epic voyage and with the assistance of a Dutch ship, she managed to reach the Cape.³⁸ The fact that the Cape was the only place of safety in a vast and hostile ocean, underlined its inherent value to seafarers.

Yet, even this safety was precarious and the maritime history of the Cape includes many long and interesting tales of ships in distress and constant ship losses. Ships in Table Bay were at times surprised by unseasonable storms, as a violent north-north-westerly storm caused seven ships to run aground in Table Bay on 12 April 1790.³⁹ Not only richly laden cargo vessels were lost, but warships also met their graves at the Cape. In May 1786 the Dutch ship of the line *Holland* stranded on the coast of the southern peninsula⁴⁰ and the French frigate *Penelope* in False Bay in October 1788.⁴¹

Statistics indicate that a large number of ships visited the Cape between 1785 and 1791, as the annual average was close to 170 ships. However, due to the tension in Europe and the outbreak of war in 1792, it declined immediately: the figure for 1791 was 183, 154 in 1792 and 128 in 1793.⁴² Correct shipping statistics after this date is impossible because of insufficient archival sources.⁴³

36

Ibid.

37

NAN 1.01.50 – 1189, Eenige Missiven ..., Van de Graaff – Stadhouder, 4/3/1786 and 19/7/1790.

38

G.M. Theal, *History of Africa South of the Zambesi*, III, pp.261-2.

39

Ibid.

40

J.C. de Jonge, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Zeewezen*, IV, p.733.

41

C180, Resolutiën, 27/11/1788, pp.162-4, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005)

42

See the statistics in C. Beyers, *Die Kaapse Patriotte*, p.335.

43

G.M. Theal, *History of Africa South of the Zambesi*, III, p.259.

Politically all was not peaceful at the Cape. Between 1778 and 1786 the Cape *Patriotten*, inspired by their Dutch compatriots, tried to improve the living conditions of the burghers and limit the corruption of the VOC officials. The officials at the Cape were mostly pro-Orange, while the *Patriotten* wished to place more political power in the hands of the population. Despite two deputations to the Netherlands, they achieved little and they failed to gain representation on the Council of Policy, or greater commercial freedom.⁴⁴ Though the movement lost some momentum in the 1780's due to the economic prosperity, by the 1790's, with drastically reduced government spending and fewer ships visiting the Cape, dissatisfaction with the VOC became widespread and Van de Graaff complained about it to the Stadtholder in 1790.⁴⁵ Many burghers wanted to get rid of the VOC and resort under the control of the States-General, or even wished to create an independent state.

How did Van de Graaff perform as Governor of the Cape? Van de Graaff lacked administrative skills, was aloof, extravagant and tactless. Surely, not the best makeup for a Governor in trying times. Due to the heavy losses the VOC suffered during the war the *Heeren XVII* soon ordered him to keep expenditure low and focus on essential aspects.⁴⁶ For Van de Graaff "essential" had a different meaning, and he energetically set about improving the fortifications of the Cape. The Council of Policy was uneasy about his ambitious schemes, but early in 1787 Commissioner Adriaan Boesses visited the Cape. He acknowledged that much effort went into improving the defences of the Cape and warned that though defence of VOC possessions was important, it had to take place within the applicable financial limitations.⁴⁷ Before Boesses departed on 12 March 1787 he concluded that the management of the Cape was in order, that the colony was in the hands of a capable person and that he was impressed with the plans the Governor showed him regarding the defence of the Cape.⁴⁸

The Council of Policy was not appeased and its members expressed concern about the high expenses in December 1787. Though they did not dispute the value of proper defence, they emphasised that more care must be taken to limit the cost.⁴⁹ As always Van de Graaff had an answer. He told the Council that before he came to the Cape, many very influential persons

⁴⁴ H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind*, p.30.

⁴⁵ NAN 1.01.50 – 1189, Eenige Missiven ..., Van de Graaff – Stadhouder, 16/8/1790.

⁴⁶ CA C559, Inkomende Brieven, *Heeren XVII* – Van Plettenberg, 27/11/1784, p.60.

⁴⁷ C174, Resolutiën, 17/1/1787, pp.109-10, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁴⁸ C174, Resolutiën, 12/3/1787, pp.270-83, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁴⁹ C176, Resolutiën, 19/12/1787, pp.266-308, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

emphasised the importance of the Cape to him and he was ordered to put it in a proper state of defence.⁵⁰

Concern nonetheless grew. On 3 August 1790 O.G. de Wet (a member of the Council of Policy) submitted a protest, imploring Van de Graaff to cut expenses in accordance with the requests of the VOC. He complained that the Governor often acted without consulting the Council or gaining its approval. Expenses must urgently be reduced, even if it meant that work on the fortifications had to cease until they receive further orders.⁵¹ Van de Graaff reserved his opinion, but a month later he reacted sharply and with disapproval to De Wet's "lecture", stating it was unnecessary and that De Wet had no right to make insinuations about his person and his important work.⁵² The Council remained adamant: the Governor had to cut costs as the VOC was in a poor condition and Gilquin must help him to work more economically. Van de Graaff retorted that more work must be done and he was in charge because of the trust placed in him.

Van de Graaff also maintained an extravagant and expensive, perhaps even regal lifestyle. He had a lavish household with many servants, while the government stables (containing 66 horses in Van Plettenberg's time) was a well-equipped setup with 127 horses, one state coach, one ordinary coach and roughly 20 other vehicles ranging from light carriages to wagons.⁵³ Captain Van de Graaff was the Stable Master and the equestrian setup was to a great extent maintained for the pleasure of the Governor and his set.⁵⁴

Professionally Van de Graaff neglected many of his administrative responsibilities and squandered much money. His administration experienced vast financial shortages and by 1791 he had raised the paper money in circulation at the Cape from f100 000 to f500 000.⁵⁵ Van de Graaff often quarrelled with officials because of his habit of issuing contentious orders. Even boring Council of Policy meetings often turned out to be action-packed events with disorderly disputes even turning violent. Once the Governor drew his sword and hacked at Le Seur, the Dispenser, who fortunately ward off the blow with his cane.⁵⁶

Council of Policy meetings were poorly attended by some members (for example Gordon) and Van de Graaff would use meetings to reproach some of his opponents, or explain

⁵⁰ C178, Resolusiën, 17/6/1788, pp.303-50, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁵¹ C188, Resolusiën, 3/8/1790, De Wet – Council of Policy, pp.333-77, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁵² C189, Resolusiën, 15/9/1790, pp.144-275, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁵³ C192, Resolusiën, 10/5/1791, pp.72-256, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁵⁴ G.M. Theal, *History of Africa South of the Zambesi*, III, p.248.

⁵⁵ C.F.J. Muller (ed), *500 Jaar Suid Afrikaanse Geskiedenis*, p.98; and M.W. Spilhaus, *South Africa in the Making, 1652-1806*, pp.155-6.

⁵⁶ G.M. Theal, *History of Africa South of the Zambesi*, III, p.251.

his position on specific matters.⁵⁷ Sometimes all the members did not sign the minutes as individuals like Van Rheeде van Oudtshoorn, and even Rhenius, stated that they did not regard it as an accurate reflection of the meeting. In fact Rhenius refused to sign many things, yet they could not stop Van de Graaff from spending, and he ignored their caution. Furthermore, Van de Graaff's meetings were often more like the Order Group of a military unit, than the government of a colony. In-depth discussions on trivial military matters, such as spoiled gunpowder ensued, while serious matters received scant attention.

The relationship between Gordon and Van de Graaff was tense to put it mildly, essentially because Van de Graaff interfered in the day-to-day running of the military establishment without notifying Gordon. With Colonel De Meuron, Van de Graaff also had a poor relationship and correspondence with allegations, counter allegations and sworn statements continued for years after De Meuron left the Cape.⁵⁸ After De Wet's protest (of 3 August 1790) about the high expenses, Van de Graaff sarcastically remarked "de Hemel weet" who gave De Wet the right to criticise his actions.⁵⁹ The quarrels between the senior officials at the Cape negated much of the little legitimacy the VOC government still had and caused much contempt amongst the population. Van de Graaff was very unpopular, or as Captain Vaillant candidly reported, he was "bij uitstek gehaat".⁶⁰

The situation was becoming difficult. The *Heeren XVII* complained that they were in the dark about the affairs in the colony, they never received valuable information and were unhappy with the long drawn-out and useless reports Van de Graaff submitted. The situation was even more untenable as they experienced severe financial problems and they wanted to dismiss Van de Graaff and sent him home in disgrace, but it was not possible because of his influential connections.⁶¹ The eventual decision to get rid of Van de Graaff was taken by a special government commission on the East Indies, not by the VOC. They went about carefully, by first gaining the approval of the Stadtholder. Willem V resisted recalling Van de Graaff and stated that it would only be approved if he would not publicly be reproached for "wandirectie of pligtversuijm".⁶² Eventually it was decided in October 1790 to summon Van de Graaff to the

⁵⁷ C189, Resolutiën, 15/9/1790, pp.144-275, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).
⁵⁸ NAN 4.1.3.8.1236, Memorie van toelichting van de Gouverneur ... aan Stadhouder Willem V op een memorie van Charles Daniel, Graaf de Meuron ... betreffende klachten over het gedrag van de Gouverneur, 1790.
⁵⁹ C189, Resolutiën, 15/9/1790, pp.144-275, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).
⁶⁰ S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, Vaillant – Van der Hoop, 1/7/1789, p.175.
⁶¹ P.J. Idenburg, *De Kaap de Goede Hoop*, p.42.
⁶² H.C.V. Leibbrandt and J.E. Heeres, *Memorien van den Gouverneur Van de Graaff*, p.30n.

Netherlands to “report” on the Cape. He would not be disgraced and retained his title and salary.⁶³

Strict orders from the *Heeren XVII* arrived at the Cape on 10 February 1791. It curtailed Van de Graaff's powers, brought about drastic cuts in the administration, ordered the Governor to return to Europe within three months and hand over power to Secunde J.L. Rhenius.⁶⁴ The VOC ship *Beverwyk* stood by in Table Bay to take Van de Graaff and his entourage onboard. With his typical arrogance and ostensibly oblivious to the gravity of the situation, Van de Graaff took his time. Three months later, he was still at the Cape. The Secunde and the Council complained about his flagrant disregard for the Company's orders and expressed their concern about a VOC ship at anchor in Table Bay during winter. He eventually departed on 24 June 1791, but not before leaving instructions and designing an oath the Secunde had to take regarding the management of the Cape in his “absence”. Rhenius refused to take the oath.⁶⁵ The very unpopular Independent Fiscal Baron Van Lijnden van Bitterswijk, who apparently feared for his life, deserted his post and departed with Van de Graaff.⁶⁶

Before Van de Graaff left he wrote to the Stadtholder that the defences of the Cape were in a bad situation, an “onweerbare en akelige positie”, and that he should not be held responsible for the state it is in. He added that there were two very important issues that had to be addressed; to create greater calm amongst the burghers and to improve the defences.⁶⁷

The instructions from the *Heeren XVII* had far-reaching implications. Due to the VOC's financial difficulties work on the fortifications had to stop, the rights and privileges of officials were restricted, VOC slaves had to be reduced in number, horses in the VOC stables and the vehicles had to be sold, extra sailors and artisans had to be dispatched to Batavia and the outposts had to be sold. The Württemberg Regiment, at the Cape at that stage, had to go to Batavia without delay. Though the *Heeren XVII* knew that the troops left at the Cape were inadequate for its defence, due to the financial restraints, they had no alternative.⁶⁸

The Cape government did not function as it should during Van de Graaff's tenure and there was a general feeling of relief at the Cape when Van de Graaff left. A probe into the minutes of the Council after Van de Graaff departed and before Nederburgh and Frijkenius arrived, indicate that long serious meetings were held during which the Council grappled with the

⁶³ P.J. Idenburg, *De Kaap de Goede Hoop*, p.42.

⁶⁴ C191, Resolutiën, 15/2/1791, pp.260-347, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁶⁵ C193, Resolutiën, 24/6/1791, pp.209-325, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁶⁶ C194, Resolutiën, 29/6/1791, pp.2-88, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005). See also M.W. Spilhaus, *South Africa in the Making, 1652-1806*, pp.155-6.

⁶⁷ NAN 1.01.50 – 1189, Eenige Missiven ..., Van de Graaff – Stadhouder, 28/1/1791 and 19/2/1791.

fundamental issues of managing the Cape and balancing the books. The Council of Policy reported that Van de Graaff had kept the clerks busy in writing and copying heaps of irrelevant reports and correspondence without addressing fundamental issues. They also protested about his excessive and uncontrolled expenditure without their approval.

Van de Graaff had no doubt contributed to the financial difficulties of the VOC in its final years. With the VOC in decline, the States-General intervened into its affairs and in November 1791 they created a special commission to reform it. Two Commissioners-General, Nederburgh and Frijkenius, were despatched to a number of VOC possessions with wide powers to affect change. They arrived at the Cape in June 1792. Their investigation at the Cape took about fifteen months and they streamlined the administration and economy. During their stay at the Cape the war in Europe broke out. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

4. THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT AT THE CAPE

4.1. Van de Graaff's Military Adjustments and General Considerations on Defence

While at the Cape in 1783 Van Braam wrote to the Stadtholder that if the VOC wished to retain the Cape, they had to realise that it was the key to the Indies, and if they were to lose it to a competitor, they will never get it back.⁶⁹ He also warned the VOC that the French knew the defence situation at the Cape very well – a dangerous situation if they were to become the future enemy. The British also had good intelligence, and as they were an 'ambitious power', they would do whatever was necessary to extend and promote their trade.⁷⁰ Soon afterwards (in 1784) Gordon emphasised to the *Heeren XVII* that it was very urgent to place the artillery and fortifications of the Cape on a more substantial footing. With proper improvements to the fortifications, it would be possible to defend the Cape with a medium sized garrison against a much bigger attacking force. Without proper fortifications on the other hand, the fate of the Cape could be sealed with only one battle. It must therefore be improved during peacetime to prevent the Cape from once more being in a defenceless situation with the outbreak of war.⁷¹

The VOC acknowledged that changes were necessary in the way the Cape was managed. It was nearly captured by the British and they realised that a small garrison and the burghers were not enough to defend it against a foreign attack. To begin with, the number of

⁶⁸ G.M. Theal, *History of Africa South of the Zambesi*, III, p.250.

⁶⁹ CA VC120, Van Braam – Stadhouder, 1/10/1783, pp.125-6.

⁷⁰ CA VC121, Van Braam, *Memorien en Aanmerkingen over den Staat der Colonie*, pp.49-51.

⁷¹ CA VC117, Gordon – *Heeren XVII*, 1/5/1784, pp.4-6.

regular soldiers at the Cape was bolstered with foreign regiments in VOC service, while the fortifications had to be improved. A professional soldier and favourite of the Stadtholder, C.J. Van de Graaff was therefore appointed as Governor. Van de Graaff energetically started to work, while constantly reporting to the Stadtholder on the important work he was doing, with much emphasis on his personal contribution and insight.⁷² He described the military establishment at the Cape and was accurate in his deduction that it was not unified (every commander commanded his own corps separately) and that they were therefore not ready to act efficiently in an emergency. De Meuron and the officers of the Meuron Regiment were like a separate clan, while the Artillery Corps was too weak for the 250 guns at the Cape. It had to be strengthened, but Van de Graaff stated that he understood it was difficult times.⁷³ His actions though, would not show the same appreciation for financial restrictions.

Due to limited posts at the Cape, officers served in the same rank for long periods without promotion or realistic prospects of promotion, while others became too old and not fit for their responsibilities ("door ouderdom, onbekwaam geworden Officiëren"). Despite this, Gordon reported that most still performed their tasks with diligence and should receive special merits as they had given worthy service to the VOC – they could not just be pushed aside.⁷⁴ Such officers often received a so-called "rust gagie", or pension. Van de Graaff decided it was necessary to provide more opportunities for promotion and in May 1785 he suggested that they create a few additional posts.⁷⁵ Van de Graaff enjoyed making appointments and had the tendency to create new titles, do postings and promote people without consultation. Some of the titles he created were new, but the military functions were not, while many of the functions were in any case performed by officers without having a special title.

His cycle of appointments and promotions started in August 1785 when Lieutenant Engineer L.M. Thibault (formerly from the Swiss Meuron Regiment) was taken into VOC service and D.M. Barbier was appointed as Lieutenant Engineer. Next, his son was promoted to Captain in February 1786 and Gilquin was promoted to Colonel in April 1786.⁷⁶ In May 1786 Van de Graaff notified the Council of Policy of his decision to make the following new appointments in the military establishment: The *Hoofd der Militie* performed many minor organisational tasks, while he also had many military responsibilities and should focus on the

⁷² See the Van de Graaff correspondence in NAN 1.01.50 – 1189, Eenige Missiven van den H^r C.J. Van de Graaff Gouverneur op Cabo de Goede Hoop.

⁷³ NAN 1.01.50 – 1189, Eenige Missiven ..., Van de Graaff – Stadhouder, 10/4/1785.

⁷⁴ C181, Resolutiën, 13/1/1789, pp.2-88, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁷⁵ C168, Resolutiën, 4/5/1785, pp.441-70, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

defence of a big colony. As a result the staff complement must be improved. The first requirement was for a stable and orderly administration to be created, then a second in command, or a “Groot Majoor” must be appointed to support the Garrison Commander and take over his duties if he was not available. Van de Graaff considered Baron C.P.R. de Bonstetten of the Meuron Regiment as the best person for the post. Thirdly a “Hoofd Officier” had to be appointed to control the organisation of training, exercises and the household responsibilities as such tasks was not the responsibility of the Garrison Commander. Captain M.W. de Lille was promoted to Major and given these responsibilities since the oldest captain in the garrison (Captain L.C. Warneck, a capable and meticulous officer) was ill and too old to perform his normal military functions anymore.⁷⁷ Fourthly a “Plaats Majoor” post had to be created to assist the “Groot Majoor” with his functions and Captain-Lieutenant J.A. Bleumer was suggested, but later Captain A.U.H. Niepe of the Meuron Regiment was appointed as Major in this post.⁷⁸ Fifthly Van de Graaff thought it necessary to appoint a “Commies der Maguazijnen” to control and safeguard the magazines and the storage of ammunition in the Castle and around the city as there was a steady increase in the quantity of munitions kept at the Cape. Captain H.W. Ruts (artillery), who managed the workshops, received this honour.⁷⁹ In August 1786 Van de Graaff also promoted J. Stijn and J.A. Bleumer to Captains and made a number of new junior appointments.⁸⁰

In December 1787 Van de Graaff received a letter from the *Heeren XVII* (dated 20 June 1787), stating that he had operated outside his responsibilities and that they did not agree with the new posts he created, or with the promotion of De Bonstetten, De Lille and Bleumer to Major. The appointment of the so-called “Commies” was confusing to the artillery and the control function of ammunition.⁸¹ They also warned that relations in Europe were tense and as the Netherlands could get involved in a war, the possibility of an attack on the Cape existed. The proper defence of the Cape must therefore receive attention and he should not create disorder in the military establishment with his reorganisation.⁸² A week after he received the orders, Van de Graaff told the Council of Policy that they must notify the *Heeren XVII* that the

⁷⁶ See the resolutions of the Council of Policy, C169, 5/8/1785, pp.87-111; C170, 7/2/1786, pp.298-314; and C171, 19/4/1786, pp.118-277, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁷⁷ C171, Resolutiën, 17/5/1786, pp.354-72, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁷⁸ C174, Resolutiën, 26/1/1787, pp.124-52, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁷⁹ C171, Resolutiën, 17/5/1786, pp.354-72, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁸⁰ C172, Resolutiën, 4/8/1786, Steffers – Van de Graaff, 4/8/1786, pp.240-88,

<http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁸¹ See CA C564, Inkomende Brieven, 20/6/1787, pp.254-7; and C176, Resolutiën, 11/12/1787, pp.228-65, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁸² C176, Resolutiën, 11/12/1787, pp.228-65, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

important new posts were created to improve the defence, because of the critical situation in Europe.⁸³

After the VOC cancelled the promotions, the various officers reverted to their former ranks and had to pay back the extra money they had received.⁸⁴ Van de Graaff had them continue with their designated functions (without the promotion)⁸⁵ and in the end the *Heeren XVII* performed a volte-face on the issue. In a letter dated 16 May 1788 (received in March 1789), they approved Van de Graaff's appointments and complemented him on persuading the *Groot Majoor*, *Plaats Majoor* and *Commis der Magazijnen* to continue with their functions. The appointment of the *Groot Majoor* had to be consistent with the stipulations of the post in Batavia.⁸⁶

When Van de Graaff became Governor, the issue concerning Gordon's authority (referred to the *Heeren XVII* in 1783) was still not finally settled. In June 1784 Gordon again asked for clarification regarding his status as *Hoofd van de Militie*. Orders the VOC issued on 28 July 1785, eventually arrived on 3 February 1786. These orders were comprehensive and stipulated that Gordon commanded the whole military establishment, and that all the VOC forces and the foreign regiments, had to report to Gordon: "alle Zaken die den militairen dienst conserneeren zal staan onder de beveelen van het Hoofd en Chef den Militie".⁸⁷ The artillery also had to report to Gordon on a daily basis. With the approval of the Governor Gordon could inspect the artillery whenever he wanted to and he also had to be notified about all matters concerning the management of gunpowder, ammunition and magazines.⁸⁸ The delays regarding the finalisation of Gordon's authority clearly illustrated the inability of the VOC to act decisively on military matters. Though the VOC was a commercial and not a military organization, it was still dependent on its military power for survival, yet, it did not pay enough attention to military aspects. Standing Orders should have been in place regarding the authority of Governors vis-à-vis foreign troops and VOC Commanders, or should have been created when the first foreign regiments were dispatched. The answer Gordon received in the end was militarily accurate and a vast improvement on the erroneous approach of Van Plettenberg to command and control issues.

⁸³ C176, Resolutiën, 19/12/1787, pp.266-308, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁸⁴ *Briefwisseling van Hendrik Swellengrebel*, Caabsche Nouvelles over 1787-1788, Cloete – Swellengrebel, p.256.

⁸⁵ C177, Resolutiën, 8/1/1788, pp.2-53, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁸⁶ C182, Resolutiën, 18/3/1789, pp.27-57, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁸⁷ CA C2379, Instruksies, *Heeren XVII*, Extract Patriasche Missive, 28/7/1785, p.65.

⁸⁸ See the detail regarding the military organisation in CA C2379, Instruksies, *Heeren XVII*, Extract Patriasche Missive, 28/7/1785, pp.63-70.

It is evident that the personal relationship between Van de Graaff and Gordon was notoriously bad. Van de Graaff interfered in the running of the military establishment, created new military posts and titles, promoted officers and issued orders without it going through Gordon. These were issues of military command; Van de Graaff was militarily incorrect and it undermined Gordon's authority. In addition Van de Graaff was the political head, but interfered in regimental matters. Furthermore, though Van de Graaff was not a military appointment, he held the functional military rank of Lieutenant-Colonel and Gordon, a Colonel, might have been affronted by Van de Graaff's unprofessional attitude towards him and his command. The two men had grave differences about the *Pepinieren*, while despite his hard work on the fortifications Van de Graaff only gave scant attention to aspects relating to the infantry and militia. It seems that Van de Graaff did not consult Gordon much on military matters and in official documents there is little proof of Gordon's participation in his projects. Gordon ceased to attend Council of Policy meetings and only attended them again after Van de Graaff's departure.

During 1789 Gordon was ill and often excused himself from the Council of Policy because of his high fever. Hendrik Cloete wrote in March 1790 that Gordon had laid down his command a year earlier and was not yet back in command.⁸⁹ Van de Graaff confirmed it in a letter to the Stadtholder, adding that as a result of the constant indisposition of Gordon, Baron Von Hügel of the Württemberg Regiment had very competently commanded the garrison.⁹⁰ Military and other observers, however, were always impressed with Gordon and regularly commented on it. One of the senior officers of the Württemberg Regiment, *Obersleutenant* (Lieutenant-Colonel) Von Franquemont was impressed with Gordon, highlighted the fact that he was an explorer of note and described him as an archetypical soldier, or as "ganz Soldat".⁹¹ British visitors to the Cape were equally impressed. When Major-General Lachlan Macquarie, the later Governor of New South Wales, met Gordon in June 1788 he was much taken and described him as 'agreeable and facetious a Companion as I ever met ... a tall Soldierlike Man'.⁹²

As news of wars took some time to reach the Cape, the authorities always had to be vigilant to prevent them from being surprised by a naval force arriving unexpectedly. An interesting event occurred in October 1788 when French warships with a thousand or more Irish soldiers in French service (Regiment of Walsh) arrived at the Cape. The French wished to disembark the troops, but the Cape authorities were not warned that the troops would stay over

⁸⁹ *Briefwisseling van Hendrik Swellengrebel*, Cloete – Swellengrebel, p.279.

⁹⁰ P. Cullinan, *Robert Jacob Gordon*, p.167.

⁹¹ J. Prinz, *Das Württembergische Kapregiment 1786-1808. Die Tragödie einer Söldnerschar*, p.89.

at the Cape, were concerned about the potential threat it posed and the arrogance of the French commander, De Tournoué. The French were then allowed to have only 20 unarmed soldiers per ship at any one time ashore and the men had to return to their ships at sunset. Van de Graaff tried to use this incident as motivation for more troops at the Cape, but to no avail. He afterwards reported that the States-General commended him on the caution he took in handling the situation.⁹³ When the French frigate *Le Penelope* stranded and the rest of the squadron had to leave for Mauritius, De Tournoué asked permission for the Captain and some officers to remain behind so that they could return to Europe, while about 35 men also had to stay at the Cape for a while to recuperate. The Council was hesitant as relations with France were not good and they did not want French troops at the Cape. However, they decided to approve it in order not to affront the French.⁹⁴

One of the problems the Cape experienced after the outbreak of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War was a shortage of gunpowder. Van de Graaff immediately tried to ensure that enough gunpowder was stored at the Cape and in June 1786 he asked the Netherlands to provide more gunpowder, as the quantity in storage was insufficient and in his estimation a million pounds of gunpowder (about 454000kg) was necessary to properly defend the Cape.⁹⁵ By 1792 the Cape had 157000kg (346200lb) gunpowder with about 147000kg stored in vats and about 10000kg packed into bags (for artillery use). The vats were stored in the powder magazines of the Castle, the big magazine behind the Sea Lines, the magazines and powder rooms of the *Chavonnes*, *Imhoff*, *Amsterdam*, *Charlotte*, *Nieuwe* batteries and *Fort Knokke* as well as in the workshops of the *Amsterdam Battery*. Some of the bags were on the ramparts of the batteries for immediate use and explosive shells filled with gunpowder were also stacked in the casemates of the *Amsterdam Battery*.⁹⁶ The powder magazines were regarded as safe enough, but it was a risk to store gunpowder in the workshops of the *Amsterdam Battery*. The situation was however relieved when the Württemberg Regiment departed as less ammunition had to be stored.

Van de Graaff despatched a large number of documents on the defence of the Cape to the Netherlands, yet many of these documents contained long discussions on improvements and plans and it was not always clear exactly what was done. By the middle of 1789 the

⁹² As quoted in P. Cullinan, *Robert Jacob Gordon*, p.165.

⁹³ H.C.V. Leibbrandt and J.E. Heeres, *Memorien van den Gouverneur Van de Graaff*, pp.23-5.

⁹⁴ C180, *Resolutiën*, 17/11/1788, pp.162-4, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁹⁵ C172, *Resolutiën*, 14/6/1786, pp.2-88, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁹⁶ The original quantities were given in pounds and were converted into kilograms. See C202, *Resolutiën*, 16/3/1792, pp.103-82, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

uneasiness of the *Heeren XVII* was evident as they expressed their concern about the cost of fortifications and asked Van de Graaff to provide them with detailed plans indicating exactly what was done and what was planned, as it was not evident from the documents he submitted. On receiving the letter (in November 1789) Van de Graaff explained that he believed he did more than his duty required, since he also assisted with the engineering duties and added that despite the financial plight of the VOC, the garrison had to be augmented for the proper defence of the Cape.⁹⁷

The VOC was not going to get straight answers from Van de Graaff and he was ordered to report to the Netherlands. In accordance with the instructions from the *Heeren XVII* (dated 2 October 1790) that arrived in February 1791, the following changes had to be implemented with immediate effect in the military establishment at the Cape: Even though the Cape Garrison was only about 75% staffed, it had to be maintained at the strength it was, and not at the 1000 (600 infantry and 400 artillerymen) the VOC approved earlier. Gordon and Gilquin had to ensure that they do not have too many officers compared to the number of men and Captains Van de Graaff and Thibault had to stay at the Cape, while two other engineering officers had to go to the East. The *pasganger* system or free passes that were stopped in 1781 could be instituted again on the same basis than before (despite Gordon advising against its re-institution). The Military Cadet School (*Kweekschool*) had to be closed, the troops of the depot of VOC soldiers (*Pepinieren* or *Pépinière*) had to be despatched to the Indies and the Württemberg Regiment had to go to Batavia without delay. The depot of the Meuron Regiment had to be maintained, while a depot also had to be created for the Württemberg Regiment, so that its troops could train and acclimatize at the Cape.⁹⁸

The *Heeren XVII* also ordered all the construction work on fortifications to stop with immediate effect and the fortifications under construction should not be completed. Fortifications only had to be maintained to prevent them from collapsing. Gilquin had to do an urgent survey of all the Company buildings at the Cape and indicate their use and condition so that decisions could be made regarding their future.⁹⁹ Van de Graaff obviously considered all these decisions as erroneous and was very sarcastic about the fact that he had to vacate his position, stating that the authority was now in the hands of Rhenius, a merchant with no knowledge of military affairs: "opgeleid was tot den theehandel in China!"¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ C184, Resolutiën, 27/11/1789, pp.55-249, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁹⁸ C191, Resolutiën, 15/2/1791, pp.260-347, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ H.C.V. Leibbrandt and J.E. Heeres, *Memorien van den Gouverneur Van de Graaf*, p.29.

In May 1791 a rather stern letter from the VOC arrived, slating the excesses and poor management of the Cape as “Schandelijke excessen, en Wanorden in de Huishoudinge deezes Gouvernement...”.¹⁰¹ Expenses had to be kept low and the Council of Policy was warned that the cost of carpentry work, repairs and fortifications were excessive. They requested the reports and plans of the Military Commission, as they had not yet received it. The *Heeren XVII* was very critical of all facets of the administration of the Cape and essentially stated that Van de Graaff had no appreciation of the limitations within which the VOC was managed. To them, he looked like a vainglorious compulsive spender.¹⁰²

4.2. Van Braam and Gordon on the Defence of the Cape

In order to justify his defence expenditure, Van de Graaff compiled a rather comprehensive document for the Stadtholder in 1787 on the status of the defences at the Cape and also made suggestions concerning its improvement. Similar documents to the *Heeren XVII* and the Stadtholder followed. In these documents he usually provided an overview of the operational aspects relating to the defence of the Cape against an enemy attack, discussed the possible amphibious landing sites and made suggestions on how to improve the fortifications.¹⁰³ Other such documents, analysing the defence of the Cape, were also completed shortly after the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, notably the remarks by Van Braam on the defence of the Cape, the examination of the defence of the Cape by Gordon (in 1786) and the study of the Military Commission (appointed by the State) in 1789. The report of the Military Commission is a comprehensive and all encompassing study that will be discussed later in this chapter.

Before the Military Commission arrived at the Cape, military planning did take place. Van de Graaff was prolific in generating very general defence information and succeeded in despatching a vast amount to the Netherlands. Most of the material was concerned with the planning of fortifications and it is understandable that the *Heeren XVII* were frustrated because from his reports, they could not ascertain exactly what was done and what still had to be done.

Before Van de Graaff arrived (in 1784) Gordon wrote to the *Heeren XVII* that the fortifications at the Cape must be improved and that they need more troops. As a loyal Dutchmen he pleaded with the *Heeren XVII* to please take heed of the warnings as they were

¹⁰¹ CA C192, p.259 and C193, Resolutiën, 13/5/1791, pp.1-30, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁰² CA C587, Inkomende Brieven, *Heeren XVII* – Council of Policy, 4/1/1791, pp.34-112.

¹⁰³ NAN 1.01.50 – 1235, Memorie concerneerende den staat van deffensie van de Caap de Goede Hoop, geformeerd door den Goeverneur Van de Graaff, in den Jaare 1787, 24/9/1787.

nearly ruined because of a lack of defence measures: "... uyt gebrek van tyds genoomen militaire maatregelen tot op den oever van haar verderff geraakt...".¹⁰⁴ Van Braam added that due to the strategic location of the Cape competition between the maritime powers for control of the Cape was a reality and would continue. Consequently attacks from across the sea (maritime power projection) posed the greatest threat to the security of the Cape.¹⁰⁵ Like Van Braam, Gordon believed it was the European maritime powers ("Europeaansche Zee-Mogenheeden") which threatened the Cape.¹⁰⁶ Britain would immediately try to capture the Cape if war broke out again and would easily succeed as the Cape was poorly defended. Van Braam urged the powers that be in the Netherlands to wake-up to this reality and become more serious about defending the Cape. A comprehensive defensive plan must be compiled he stated, while the Cape should have proper fortifications and a respectable garrison. The relationship with the population must improve to make the government more legitimate and things should never slip back into the pitiful state it was in at the outbreak of the war.¹⁰⁷ Gordon asked for a comprehensive defensive plan to be designed at the Cape, because if it was done in the Netherlands, it would just result in lengthy correspondence without concrete results.¹⁰⁸

Gordon's analysis called "Beredeneerde Memorie over den staat van defensie van Cabo de Goede Hoop", was an extensive 93 page handwritten document divided into 33 subsections. Its purpose was to provide the *Heeren XVII* with a framework for the defence of the Cape. In it he discussed the defence establishment and fortifications and made proposals on the most effective way to defend the Cape. Despite criticism to the opposite, Gordon showed himself a capable and professional officer that understood what proper defence against the power projection of a maritime power implied within the limited resources of the VOC. This is one of the most important single documents on the defence of the Cape in Dutch and is clear of emotions or rhetoric – military arguments are simply postulated and argued. This document therefore warrants more than just scant attention.

To Gordon the defence of the Cape rested on a number of crucial variables: The first was the extent of its fortifications and the quantity and quality of its artillery. Secondly, the size, organisation and ability of its troops were important because they had to stop an enemy that had landed, or secure the Cape if the fortifications failed. Furthermore, he stressed the important role of geography and natural obstacles as they enhanced the defence. Finally, he stated that

¹⁰⁴ CA VC117, Gordon – *Heeren XVII*, 1/5/1784, p.10.

¹⁰⁵ CA VC121, Van Braam, *Memorien en Aanmerkingen over den Staat der Colonie*, pp.31-5.

¹⁰⁶ CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, p.13.

¹⁰⁷ CA VC121, Van Braam, *Memorien en Aanmerkingen over den Staat der Colonie*, pp.31-5.

¹⁰⁸ CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, pp.50-2.

the ability to mobilise reinforcements or obtain military assistance was important variable for the defence of the Cape.¹⁰⁹

The fortifications of the Cape consisted of natural and man-made defences. The weather conditions around the coast (with strong seasonal winds, heavy seas, little protection in bad weather), as well as the rocky coastline was a natural hindrance to any would-be attacker and would make amphibious landings difficult. If an enemy landed away from the Cape (for example at Saldanha Bay or St Helena Bay) he would have to advance across barren terrain (dunes and deep sand covered with shrubs and with very little water). Without draught animals, this would be very arduous, and it would make him prone to attacks by defenders who knew the area very well.¹¹⁰

By 1786 the militia from the districts were at least a thousand strong, well motivated and quite proficient with their weapons. Yet, Gordon warned against placing too much reliance on them for the following reasons: First, they were not regular soldiers and would not necessarily resist a concerted attack by well disciplined European troops. Also if they were called-up, many might arrive late, while others might not leave their farms due to the security situation in the interior. The further away from Cape Town, the longer it would take the militia to get to the Cape, while it might be difficult to accommodate the whole militia at the Cape. Moreover, if an enemy invested itself to the east of Cape Town, it might separate the militia from the town and prevent them from linking up with the garrison. With little intelligence, no military direction and a shortage of logistics the militia would probably then retire. Gordon realised that an enemy could cut the link between the Cape and the interior, but as cavalry could prevent it, the VOC had to prepare to provide lodging for at least 600 militiamen and horses at the Cape at short notice.¹¹¹

Gordon recognised that to the Dutch, British and French the Cape was very important for maritime power projection to the East. Being without the Cape, however, could ruin the VOC – which was exactly what the British had always tried to do. France, he maintained would find it difficult to conduct any significant campaigns in the East without the Cape as it was an important base to them during the previous war. Gordon was convinced that the French would attack the Cape if they fought a war against the Dutch. As they knew its defences very well, this posed a considerable threat. The Dutch government must take note of the French-British competition to control of the Cape – it was a reality!¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, p.13.

¹¹⁰ CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, pp.14-5.

¹¹¹ CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, pp.35-7.

¹¹² CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, pp.45-7.

Improvements to the defences of the Cape were necessary in four areas; fortifications, artillery, infantry as well as an adequate ammunition supply and war materials.¹¹³ Good fortifications were important in warfare as strong armies were often foiled by an inferior force with good fortifications, while provinces were even conquered because of a lack of decent fortifications. Good fortifications were one of the surest ways of dissuading a likely attacker. The French lost Pondicherry in 1778 because they had neglected its defences and it lacked troops, military material and ammunition.¹¹⁴

Proper defence of the Cape depended on good fortifications. Gordon suggested the following improvements: First, the potential landing beaches had to be properly defended. A twelve gunned fort had to be erected behind Lion's Head (to defend Kamptz Bay) and two enclosed batteries (six and twelve gunned) had to be erected at Mouille Point and at Green Point, to prevent landings at these rocky beaches in quiet weather and hinder ships coming into the bay. The *Chavonnes Battery* had to be improved and armed with at least thirty 24-pounders and six mortars, while a large permanent battery must be erected in Roggebaay to defend the anchorage.¹¹⁵ As Simon's Town only had temporary batteries, two batteries armed with at least twelve 24-pounders and two 12-pounder mortars, were an urgent requirement. Gordon considered Muizenberg as an important location and a redoubt with at least 16 small guns had to be erected there to secure the road to Simon's Bay and prevent an enemy from marching to the Cape from Simon's Bay. He was however not convinced that Simon's Bay would be the first choice for an attacker due to its distance from the Cape.¹¹⁶ Secondly, Hout Bay must be properly fortified as Gordon was convinced that good fortifications on the eastern and western side of the bay could provide covering fire for at least twelve large VOC ships. Finally, Gordon suggested that a big six-sided fortification had to be erected between the Salt River mouth and Devil's Peak to provide protection against an enemy attacking Cape Town overland.¹¹⁷ In principle Van Braam agreed with Gordon, stating that many of the fortifications were temporary fortifications, erected in haste, without sufficient military significance. They had to be systematically rebuilt and improved.¹¹⁸

In Gordon's 1786 estimation the Cape required an infantry force of roughly 3000, 200 dragoons or mounted jagers ("dragonders of jaagers te paard") and an artillery corps of at least

¹¹³ CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, pp.50-2.

¹¹⁴ CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, pp.53-4.

¹¹⁵ CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, pp.57-9.

¹¹⁶ CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, pp.15-7 and 59-60.

¹¹⁷ CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, pp.60-9.

¹¹⁸ CA VC121, Van Braam, *Memorien en Aanmerkingen over den Staat der Colonie*, p.37.

500. In an emergency the artillery could then be supplemented by seamen, labourers and VOC officials.¹¹⁹ It was important for all the troops to be properly maintained and trained due to the isolated location of the Cape and the possibility of a surprise attack.

Gordon appreciated that the best defence against maritime power projection was a navy as he emphasised that the Cape was saved by the naval force of De Suffren. He warned that both France and Britain had the naval capacity to project a force to the Cape, while both were also well aware of the poor defence of the Cape. British-French rivalry might have been to their advantage, yet, they were also in a dangerous situation as both would not hesitate to use force to prevent the other from using the Cape in a future war. The VOC would not be able to do anything about it, simply because of the maritime power projection capacity of these powers.¹²⁰

Though Van Braam and Gordon both mentioned the important role of navies in defence, they gave scant attention to it – probably because of the limited Dutch resources. Van Braam thought that a few fast sailing ships had to be stationed at the Cape to provide quick communications with the East and Europe. Such a ship, or ships, could also patrol the coast and provide assistance in the form of search and rescue in an emergency and could provide early warning to both the Cape and the East.¹²¹ Gordon was more ambitious. He thought that one ship of the line and two frigates stationed at the Cape to cruise the coast would be of great benefit to the defence of the Cape. They could warn the Cape of an approaching enemy, serve as packet boats, hinder an enemy when it performs amphibious landings, or anchor and act as floating batteries in support of shore batteries. Finally, he thought such vessels could also interdict commerce. During the war richly laden British East Indiamen often passed very close to the coast, while they had no means to capture them. With a fast sailing warship, such ships could be captured and due to their immense value, they would cover much of the cost of maintaining warships at the Cape, and could even contribute to the cost of running the Cape.¹²²

4.3. Fortifications, Engineering and the Artillery Corps

As the power and purse of the VOC declined, the strategic value of the Cape and the competition amongst the maritime empires of the day to secure its use, increased. After the war, the VOC knew the Cape must be able to defend itself against an attack from the sea and that the series of forts and redoubts clustered around Table Bay were inadequate as most were

¹¹⁹ CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, pp.74-6.

¹²⁰ CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, pp.41-4.

¹²¹ CA VC121, Van Braam, *Memorien en Aanmerkingen over den Staat der Colonie*, pp.9-10 and 24.

¹²² CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, pp.90-1.

temporary or earthen ramparts, with wooden structures.¹²³ Only the Castle with the *Couvre face Imhoff* and the *Chavonnes Battery* were fortifications of substance and plans were already afoot to replace the 's *Heer Hendricks Kinderen* (in ruins) with a strong permanent fortification.¹²⁴ The Committee for Secret Affairs also campaigned to improve the defence and station more engineering officers and artillerists, competent enough to erect fortifications and command heavy gun batteries at the Cape.¹²⁵ It is against this background and on the advice of the Stadtholder that Van de Graaff was appointed. The VOC ordered him to immediately establish the shortcomings in the defences of the Cape, report on the state of affairs and make suggestions for improving it.¹²⁶

When Van de Graaff took over much work went into designing a new system of fixed defences and numerous exceptional plans were drawn, though much of it was never implemented. Whereas the Old Dutch system of fortifications was known for its straight flanks (for example the Castle), Vauban and Coehoorn introduced curved flanks in the bastion designs and added orillons. These innovations were not introduced into the fortifications at the Cape, but appeared on a 1786 draft by Van de Graaff of a line of redoubts and entrancements running from the Castle to the slope of Devil's Peak.¹²⁷ Commissioner Boessen was impressed by Van de Graaff's plans and stated that it must be implemented.¹²⁸ In September 1787 Van de Graaff compiled a long document for the Stadtholder; explaining that many defences had to be rebuilt or improved, while a number of new fortifications must be erected in Table Bay and around the peninsula. One of the problems with the defences of the Cape, in Van de Graaff's view, was that some artillery pieces were incorrectly placed and a proper study was necessary to place the right calibre and type of guns at the locations where it would have the most effect.¹²⁹

Van de Graaff and six engineering officers started with an impressive cartographic process in order to establish where to place fortifications around the peninsula. According to Dutch specialists like Koeman and Zandvliet, the draughtsmanship of these maps was of an impressive standard and they showed much detail relating to roads, rivers, mountain

¹²³ CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, p.27.

¹²⁴ U. Seeman, *Amsterdam Battery*, p.12.

¹²⁵ NAN VOC4922, C.J. van de Graaf, *Memorie houdende eenige punten dewelke de onderget: de vrijmoedigheid heeft genoomen in consideratie te geeven*, 24/3/1784.

¹²⁶ A.J. Boeseken, *Nederlandse Kommissaris*, p.98.

¹²⁷ U. Seeman, *Forts and Fortifications at the Cape Peninsula, 1781-1829*, pp.33-4.

¹²⁸ C174, *Resolutiën*, 12/3/1787, pp.270-83, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹²⁹ NAN 4.1.3.8.1235, *Verslag van C.J. de Graaff, gouverneur aan de Kaap de Goede Hoop, betreffende de staat van het defensiewezen aan de Kaap*, 1787.

characteristics, local names, morphology and also contain geographic information.¹³⁰ Such maps were indispensable for military operations, troop movement and the selection of locations for fortifications. A very important four meter long (1:200 000 scale) hydrographical chart of the Cape Coast was completed in 1791 which provided topographic information of an eighty kilometre strip along the shoreline. As the coast was the most important barrier against a European attacker, this type of information was of critical importance in planning effective coastal defence.¹³¹

A great deal was done to maintain and expand fortifications while many labourers, soldiers, and slaves worked on it. Soldiers of the Württemberg Regiment also assisted with construction work, but had to be paid extra. In June 1790 it was decided to hire more slaves instead of having to rely on the soldiers, as “in deese Landen een Europees zich Schaamt, om met de Cruiwagen te werken, en bovendien nog tot veele diensten, die men door Slaven kan laten verrichten, onwillig is”.¹³² Though many of the fortifications were unfinished by the time Van de Graaff left, all VOC buildings (including military buildings, workshops, magazines, guardhouses, etc) and fortifications were generally well maintained. The barracks were habitable, but required much maintenance while the hospital (partially used as barracks) was in a good state.¹³³

¹³⁰ See the various excellent maps and drawings contained in the National Archive in the Netherlands (TOPO15-70) as well as the copies of several Van de Graaff maps at the Castle Military Museum. A number of good maps remained in the Cape Archive Repository; see for example M1/1076, M1/11359, M1/1084, M1/11359 and M1/3563.

¹³¹ K. Zandvliet, ‘Vestingbouw in de Oost’ in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, pp.173-4.

¹³² C188, Resolutiën, 9/7/1790, pp.94-137, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹³³ C202, Resolutiën, 27/3/1792, pp.196-383, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

Table 7: Cost of Fortifications between the wars, 1784 to 1793¹³⁴

Financial Year	Expenditure
1784-85	f182370:13:8
1785-86	f142859:9:-
1786-87	f156847:17:-
1787-88	f209089:17:-
1788-89	f196027:19:8
1789-90	f136660:4:-
1790-91	f62023:17:8
1791-92	f689:8:-
1792-93	f6191:17:-

Work on fortifications was expensive as a large labour force was used, and financial reporting in the Van de Graaff era was more erratic than before. After the end of the war, in 1785-6 (see Table 7), spending came down as only work around the Castle and on the *Amsterdam Battery* was done. With Van de Graaff's work gaining momentum spending was soon basically the same than during the war. When Van de Graaff departed it was drastically reduced as work on

new fortifications ceased in the 1791-92 financial year. In 1792-3 it was again f5502 more, mainly due to the alterations on the *Chavonnes Battery*.¹³⁵

Van de Graaff did place the engineering and artillery dispensation on a more secure footing, but most of his schemes were beyond the scope of a declining VOC. In October 1786 he issued General Instructions to the engineers ("Instructie waarna zig zullen hebben te gedragen de Ingenieurs gehorende onder het Gouvernement van Cabo de Goede Hoop") that regulated their duties and responsibilities and in effect was a code of conduct. It directed them to regularly submit progress reports to the Governor, while all plans, maps and charts had to be handled with the necessary secrecy to prevent it from falling into the wrong hands. They had to take an oath to adhere to these instructions.¹³⁶

The artillery complement at the Cape urgently had to expand. Gordon requested its enlargement in 1779 and again in 1783 as he considered at least two trained artillerists per gun as ideal – which implied at least 500 artillerists. He proposed that they 'lift' volunteers from VOC ships and train them at the Cape.¹³⁷ After Van de Graaff reviewed the defence establishment, he concluded in August 1785 that fortifications and artillery was the first priority as the Cape had 250 mounted guns plus field artillery, but only had 50 regular artillerists. This was a crucial disparity. Despite the VOC emphasis on saving, he was determined to supplement the artillery

¹³⁴ The figures were compiled from the annual financial reports in the resolutions of the Council of Policy, C174, 28/3/1787; C177, 4/4/1788; C189, 15/9/1790; C213, 20/2/1793; and C225, 11/8/1794 in <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005). See also Bylae 4 in A.J. Boeseken, *Nederlandse Kommissaris*, p.243.

¹³⁵ See the resolutions of the Council of Policy, C189, 15/9/1790; C213, 20/2/1793; and C225, 11/8/1794 in <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹³⁶ Instructie waarna zig zullen hebben te gedragen de Ingenieurs gehorende onder het Gouvernement van Cabo de Goede Hoop, 10/10/1786, attached to C173, Resolutiën, 10/10/1786, pp.5-42, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹³⁷ CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, pp.28-30.

and engineers: both required two more officers, while they also needed at least an additional 100 artillerists.¹³⁸ A year later (August 1786) Van de Graaff thought it appropriate to augment the Artillery Corps to a total strength of 300 men (two companies) as soon as possible with an additional two officers, NCO's and six cadets. The *Heeren XVII* approved a larger Artillery Corps in principle, but they asked Van de Graaff to advise them on its anticipated size. He envisioned a corps of at least three artillery companies consisting of 150 men each.¹³⁹

By June 1788 the Artillery Corps was still too small ("droevig gebrek aan Arthilleristen") and it immediately required at least another 100 men. Yet, Van de Graaff stated this was still too few, and notified the VOC that the artillery establishment should be at least 500-600 strong, as it would be difficult to man all the guns with even 500 men.¹⁴⁰ At the end of 1789 the supplemented Artillery Corps consisted of 300 men, while Van de Graaff maintained that they required no less than 390 men.¹⁴¹ In 1790 the *Heeren XVII* stipulated that the Cape should have 400 artillerists. No new recruits arrived from the Netherlands and as they soon lost roughly a quarter of the Corps (about 100 men) to repatriation, death and desertion, it affected the operational competence of the artillery negatively. By March 1792 the Council considered it crucial for the security of the Cape ("voor de zeekerheid van deezen importante Colonie") to maintain the strength of the artillery and suggested that soldiers destined for Batavia should be recruited for the artillery,¹⁴² but a year and a half after Van de Graaff left, the Cape only had about 260 artillerists.¹⁴³

The Artillery Corps at the Cape became proficient in using red-hot-shot ("gloeijende kogels")¹⁴⁴ during Van de Graaff's time. Red-hot-shot was highly successful when the British used it in the defence of Gibraltar against a large Franco-Spanish attack. Ten massive floating batteries armed with 212 heavy guns, deemed indestructible by gunfire, as well as 47 other ships attacked Gibraltar on 13 September 1782. In a fierce gun battle lasting the whole day and for most of the night, the British fired red-hot-shot and destroyed all the floating batteries – they exploded or were all set alight and burned to the waterline.¹⁴⁵ The lessons were clear, and the artillery at the Cape regularly exercised with red-hot-shot (nearly on a weekly basis); with the

¹³⁸ C169, Resolutiën, 5/8/1785, pp.87-111, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹³⁹ C172, Resolutiën, 4/8/1786, pp.240-88, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁴⁰ C178, Resolutiën, 17/6/1788, pp.303-50, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁴¹ C184, Resolutiën, 27/11/1789, pp.55-249, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁴² C202, Resolutiën, 16/3/1792, pp.103-82, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁴³ C215, Resolutiën, 8/4/1793, pp.144-203, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁴⁴ Though "heated shot" is often used instead of "red-hot-shot" it is, however, not an adequate description. The shot were not just heated, but were "glowingly hot", as the Dutch term "gloeijende kogels" indicate.

¹⁴⁵ W.E.H. Lecky, *A History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, V, pp.175-8.

round shot just under melting point when fired. During an exercise held in July 1789, a wooden house used for target practice was immediately set alight.¹⁴⁶

By 1790 the financial predicament of the VOC had become critical and despite financial assistance from the State, Van de Graaff squandered too much, was recalled and the *Heeren XVII* ordered all work on the fortifications to stop. By June 1791 work by hundreds of slaves belonging to burghers had ceased.¹⁴⁷ It implied that the condition of forts would drastically deteriorate and the Council of Policy considered it essential to at least do certain maintenance work. Gilquin and Thibault were tasked on 15 November to conduct a survey of the fortifications to indicate which had to receive priority to prevent them from deteriorating. They also had to indicate what the maintenance of the ramparts and fortifications would cost.¹⁴⁸

They submitted their report on the status of fortifications and VOC buildings on 27 February 1792. It is a good and reliable description of the status of the specific fortifications at the Cape, at that stage. As many of the batteries were not permanent structures, it was important to have a labour force that could do constant maintenance work on the deteriorating fortifications and prevent some from falling into total disrepair.¹⁴⁹ According to Gilquin and Thibault, the most important priority was to complete the improvements on the *Chavonnes Battery* and its magazine, which was “een voorname gedeelte onzer sterkte teegens Vijandelyke Vlooten”.¹⁵⁰ Other immediate priorities were the ships’ stores, the yard, and the wine cellars. The Council concurred with the proposition that the *Chavonnes Battery* was a priority and decided to provide both the *Heeren XVII* and the High Council of the Indies with a thorough report.¹⁵¹

As Gilquin’s contract with the VOC had now expired, he had to return to the Netherlands. Captain-Lieutenant Thibault took over his engineering responsibilities, while Major Fisscher commanded the Artillery Corps.¹⁵² Gordon had to study the plans and maps Gilquin left behind and prioritise the work. In September 1792, when Captain S.W. van de Graaff returned to the Netherlands, Thibault was promoted to Captain. Thibault had to compile military plans and maps and was reminded that it had to be dispatched to the Netherlands on a yearly basis.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁶ CA VC58, Memorandum on the Cape by A.E. van Braam Houckgeest, July 1789.

¹⁴⁷ C193, Resolutiën, 10/6/1791, pp.97-191, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁴⁸ C198, Resolutiën, 15/11/1791, pp.96-148, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁴⁹ C202, Resolutiën, 27/3/1792, pp.196-383, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁵⁰ CA C714, Bijlagen, Gilquin and Thibault – Rhenius, 27/2/1792, p.74.

¹⁵¹ C202, Resolutiën, 27/3/1792, pp.196-383, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ C207, Resolutiën, 15/9/1792, pp.177-200, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

The report posed a predicament; urgent work had to be done on the fortifications, but due to financial constraints no labour force was available to do it. In March 1792 the Council of Policy accepted a suggestion by Gordon and Van Reede van Oudtshoorn to use convicts from Robben Island to work on the fortifications for six months.¹⁵⁴ The convicts were transferred from the island in May 1792 and were under the control of Thibault.¹⁵⁵ Soon many were ill. It was thought that this was due to the fact that they maintained vegetable gardens on the island, while ashore they received only a meagre daily ration (340 grams, meat and 455 grams, flour) which was not substantial enough for heavy labour. For humanitarian reasons (“menschlykheid vordert”) it was decided that the convicts should not be made to endure double punishment (labour and hunger), while they worked on the fortifications. Their rations improved and they also received wine and brandy.¹⁵⁶ Thibault complained that despite his best efforts, it was not possible to complete all the work between May and September and as he wanted to at least secure some of the fortifications against deterioration, much maintenance and repair still had to be done. Convict labour was maintained.¹⁵⁷

4.3.1. The Amsterdam Battery

After its completion, the *Amsterdam Battery* was arguably the most important battery in Table Bay. Its design was based on a 1725 plan that was remodelled in 1780 and it had to replace *s'Heer Hendriks Kinderen* (erected in the late 1740's).¹⁵⁸ The new *Amsterdam Battery* was a good example of fortification architecture in the late eighteenth century and the influence knowledge and understanding of ballistics had on fixed defences. It was a heavy casemate battery, meaning it had a vaulted chamber built into the thick rampart of the fortress, with embrasures for its defence. The guns were on the upper floor, while the lower floor had cellars and corbelled ceilings and housed the ammunition and cannonballs. Its walls stood 17,5 metres high, its main armament was 12,6 metres above the water and it carried a formidable armament of 66 24-pounders and six twelve inch mortars. It was also possible to use it as a barracks and

¹⁵⁴ C202, Resolutiën, 13/3/1792, pp.29-96, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁵⁵ C203, Resolutiën, 27/4/1792, pp.318-361, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁵⁶ C204, Resolutiën, 9/6/1792, pp.209-31, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁵⁷ C206, Resolutiën, 1/9/1792, pp.389-407; and C207, Resolutiën, 1/9/1792, pp.2-6, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁵⁸ CA E3505, Amsterdam Battery; and VC117 Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, p.23.

about 200 soldiers could take cover inside the front rampart. The entrance to the battery was at the rear and there were two powder magazines in the courtyard.¹⁵⁹

Construction of the *Amsterdam Battery*, directed by Gilquin, commenced in 1781 and progressed slowly due to the war. After the war Gilquin requested a larger labour force (in March 1784 and in again October 1786) to assist with cutting the shale blocks used in the rampart walls and to complete the battery.¹⁶⁰ Van de Graaff was critical of the design, but as the construction was already in an advanced state when he arrived, he could not alter it. The *Amsterdam Battery* was completed in February 1787. During the first gun trails, held on 23 February, one of the guns exploded. Two men were killed, five were badly wounded and Van de Graaff was lightly wounded.¹⁶¹

In their report, Gilquin and Thibault also evaluated the *Amsterdam Battery*. They concluded that it was well located and due to its height and firepower it was an invaluable fortification. It provided fire support to the batteries adjacent to it and they emphasised the fact that the battery could resist heavy fire from attacking ships, while it posed a significant threat to ships as it had ample heavy guns. The battery required little upkeep as only the wood and earthwork around it had to be maintained.¹⁶² Gilquin was very proud of the *Amsterdam Battery* and referred to it as “het voornaamste Werk, dat ik alhier gebouwd hebbe”, stating it was crucial for the defence of the Cape and formidable enough to stand against warships: “het Batterie bij alle voorziene en onvoorziene gevallen teegens eene Vyandelijke Zeemagt van veel nut zoude zijn, en Steeds de Zeekerste toevlugt weezen, om onse independentie als hier teegen diergelijke geweld te maintineeren, en het regt van ons Territoir Ongeschonden te Konnen bewaaren”.¹⁶³

4.3.2. Fortifications in Table Bay and around the Cape Peninsula

The Castle with its outworks, ravelins and redans together with the *Couvre face Imhoff*, just in front of it, was still the main fortification and the citadel of the colony. The well-armed *Couvre face Imhoff* was an important battery, critical for the direct defence of the Castle and the town. The problem was that most of its guns were old iron guns, eroded from exposure to the

¹⁵⁹ U. Seeman, *Amsterdam Battery*, pp.22-9.

¹⁶⁰ CA, C166, Resolutiën, 2/3/1784, pp.153-8; and C173, Resolutiën, 2/10/1786, pp.35-6.

¹⁶¹ G.M. Theal, *History of Africa South of the Zambesi*, III, p.237.

¹⁶² CA C202, Resolutiën, 27/3/1792, pp.220-1; and C714, Bijlagen, Gilquin and Thibault – Rhenius, 27/2/1792, pp.73-4.

¹⁶³ C202, Resolutiën, 16/3/1792, pp.103-82, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

weather.¹⁶⁴ Due to its old design the Castle was not an effective fortification anymore and would not be able to withstand a siege, as Van de Graaff stated: “tegens eene belegering, maar eenigzins naar de regelen aangevoerd, niet bestand zoude zyn”.¹⁶⁵ Gordon also did not have high regard for the ability of the Castle, referring to it as a “geringe fortress”, because it was outdated, small and had small bastions. However, its value, he stressed, was in the fact that it was a good headquarters, was valuable for command, communication and control in defence, while it was an important military symbol of VOC authority – both internally and externally.¹⁶⁶

The defences around the Castle were constantly improved and the Gilquin and Thibault reported on its good state of maintenance. But they emphasised that most of the earthworks were tenuous, the palisades often had to be replaced and the moat regularly excavated. They also stressed the fragility of the Castle's construction, its limited potential as it could be dominated from the slopes of Devil's Peak and stated that it would not be able to stand long against a strong and committed attack by a powerful European enemy: “niet lange teegens eenen machtigen Europeeschen vijand kunnen resisteeren”.¹⁶⁷ Their conclusion was that it was outdated and no longer met with military requirements.

During the 1780's the Sea Lines were re-erected closer to the sea, as the old line was too far behind the beach.¹⁶⁸ Gordon thought the Sea Lines required better armament, and as the anchorage was closer to its left flank (western section) of the bay, its artillery was concentrated on this side. By February 1792 the Lines were earth and stonework positions that were well maintained. Gilquin and Thibault considered it a hindrance to ships as it prevented amphibious landings on this side of the beach and it provided a secure position for the garrison and the militia to deploy behind; from where they could then be redeployed if necessary.¹⁶⁹ One of the problems with the lines was that in bad weather some of the batteries were constantly battered by waves of more than four metres and required regular repairs. When a great storm damaged the newly improved sea-facing walls of the *Elisabeth* and *Charlotte* batteries in the winter of 1792, Thibault had to repair it in the most cost effective way and reinforce the seaward side of these batteries so that they would be more resistant to the power of the sea.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁴ CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, pp.23-4.

¹⁶⁵ NAN 1.01.50 – 1235, Memorie concerneerende den staat van deffensie van de Caap de Goede Hoop, geformeerd door den Goeverneur Van de Graaff, 24/9/1787, pp.4 and 93.

¹⁶⁶ CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, pp.19 and 21.

¹⁶⁷ CA C714, Bijlagen, Gilquin and Thibault – Rhenius, 27/2/1792, p.69.

¹⁶⁸ CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, pp.24-5.

¹⁶⁹ CA C714, Bijlagen, Gilquin and Thibault – Rhenius, 27/2/1792, pp.69-70.

¹⁷⁰ C209, Resolutiën, 9/11/1792, pp.84-144, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

Fort Knokke, referred to as a “sterreschans” (a four pointed star design) at the end of the Sea Lines required constant maintenance as it had earthen ramparts with only a bit of masonry. Gilquin and Thibault thought its poor design and the fact that it was not a permanent construction, limited its value. To Van De Graaff the *Nieuwe* and *Intermediare* batteries, towards the Salt River mouth from *Fort Knokke*, were too far from *Fort Knokke* and the town to be effectively defended and due to the maintenance they required, he removed all their guns. These batteries, constructed of earth and wood, were in a dilapidated state by February 1792.¹⁷¹

The French Lines suffered the same fate in Van de Graaff's time. As they were earthen entrenchments hastily erected during the war, he considered them of little value (“geringe importantie”), stating that they could be flanked. As they required heavy maintenance and were not maintained, they were in a dilapidated condition by 1792. The *Gordon Battery*, a temporary battery erected at the foot of Devil's Peak during the war to provide cover for the plain behind the Castle, had many shortcomings and Van de Graaff decided not to maintain it.¹⁷² Van de Graaff's solution was a new entrenchment stretching from the Castle to the slope of Devil's Peak with a redoubt on the mountain slope. He therefore laid out the *Coehoorn Battery*, between the Castle and Devil's Peak. Its purpose was to cover the plain behind the Castle and to check an enemy marching on from the East. Work on the new lines and the battery commenced, but as it was only beyond the stage of foundations, it ceased when Van de Graaff departed.¹⁷³

Van de Graaff designed a new fortification in Roggebaay (*Roggebaay Battery*) to give harassing fire to approaching ships. Crossfire could be established between the right flank of this battery and the left flank of the *Imhoff*, which provided much cover to the central beach area of the Cape. As it was a masonry and earthwork battery it did not require much maintenance.¹⁷⁴

By 1786 the *Chavonnes Battery* was armed with seventeen heavy guns, but was in dilapidated (“bouwvallige situatie”) and needed an urgent upgrade.¹⁷⁵ Van de Graaff upgraded the battery considerably by adding two new wings. When the VOC ordered all work on fortifications to stop, these improvements were not yet complete. Gilquin and Thibault viewed the *Chavonnes Battery* as a large and well-located fortification (“aanzienelyk en wel geplaatst”) that formed an important part of the defence against enemy warships. To them its completion was an urgent priority.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ CA C714, Bijlagen, Gilquin and Thibault – Rhenius, 27/2/1792, p.71.

¹⁷² CA C714, Bijlagen, Gilquin and Thibault – Rhenius, 27/2/1792, p.72.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*; and CA M1/3563, L.M. Thibault, Plan de la Ville Du Cap, 1793.

¹⁷⁴ CA C714, Bijlagen, Gilquin and Thibault – Rhenius, 27/2/1792, pp.72-3.

¹⁷⁵ CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, p.22.

¹⁷⁶ CA C714, Bijlagen, Gilquin and Thibault – Rhenius, 27/2/1792, p.74.

The *Groote Mouille Battery* was essentially a great “L” shaped gun emplacement facing westward. Its purpose was to provide additional defence at the entrance to the bay. By February 1792 it, as well as the small battery at Three Anchor Bay, were still earthwork (“passagere”) fortifications in constant need of maintenance. At the same time the gun emplacements in the neck between Table Mountain and Lion’s Head, as well as between the quarry and the graveyard, were also temporary batteries in need of maintenance.¹⁷⁷

Kamptz Bay was close to Cape Town and as amphibious landings could take place on its beach, it would be very detrimental to the Cape if it fell into enemy hands. The VOC bought Van Kamptz’s farm and the road between Kamptz Bay and Cape Town was made inaccessible to prevent an enemy from using it. A military guard was stationed in Kamptz Bay and it had two small fortifications.¹⁷⁸ Van de Graaff thought it would be possible for two frigates to anchor in the bay as an East Indiamen had anchored there once before,¹⁷⁹ however, it was not a safe anchorage and a ship would not be able to stay there for long.

By 1786 the temporary battery erected in Hout Bay during the war (*West Fort*) had 16 guns and a redoubt was constructed on the other side (*East Fort*).¹⁸⁰ Van de Graaff considered the fort at Hout Bay as important (by 1787), yet, it was not good enough because it was hastily erected.¹⁸¹ According to the original plan provision had to be made for up to 25 guns on the *West Fort*, while ground was cleared for the *East Fort* which (according to the plan), had to be armed with 10 guns. By 1792 Hout Bay was considered important, yet, its fixed defences required improvement and nothing came of a proposal made by Gilquin to develop it into a commercial port with strong batteries.¹⁸²

The lack of defences in False Bay was worrying because it was an important anchorage that was vulnerable to enemy attack. Yet, it was unarmed, except for the remnants of a poor temporary fortification that the French erected during the war. In fact, as the Council of Policy stated in 1788 it was “van defensie ontbloot ... aan de prise van den Vijand zal weesen bloot gesteld”.¹⁸³ By 1783 Muizenberg had a traverse, a wooden palisade and five 6-pounders,¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁷ CA C714, Bijlagen, Gilquin and Thibault – Rhenius, 27/2/1792, pp.75-6.

¹⁷⁸ C178, Resolutiën, 13/6/1788, pp.255-302, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁷⁹ NAN 1.01.50 – 1235, Memorie concerneerende den staat van deffensie van de Caap de Goede Hoop, geformeerd door den Goeverneur Van de Graaff, in den Jaare 1787, 24/9/1787, p.26.

¹⁸⁰ VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, p.17.

¹⁸¹ NAN 1.01.50 – 1235, Memorie concerneerende den staat van deffensie van de Caap de Goede Hoop, geformeerd door den Goeverneur Van de Graaff, in den Jaare 1787, 24/9/1787, p.33.

¹⁸² CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, p.60; and C202, Resolutiën, 27/3/1792, pp.196-383, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁸³ C178, Resolutiën, 17/6/1788, pp.303-50, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁸⁴ CA VC119, Journaal van J.P. van Braam, 16/7/1783, p.23.

while a number of little traverses were also erected between Simon's Bay and Muizenberg to protect the road. Van de Graaff stated if these positions were armed with 8-pounders or even 18-pounders, it could at least provide strong resistance against an advancing enemy, but it was not done and these positions had little defensive value.¹⁸⁵

In 1786 a small military guard (a sergeant and eight men) was placed at Muizenberg to prevent smuggling to ships in Simon's Bay. When the Cape received orders to cut back on expenses the value of maintaining the post at Muizenberg was investigated, but it was kept open as the report (dated April 1791) emphasised the strategic value of Muizenberg as it provided a clear view of ships entering False Bay. When a French naval squadron unexpectedly sailed into False Bay in 1791, relations between the Dutch and the French were not as cordial as a decade earlier. As a result Muizenberg was reinforced and the French were closely watched. After the French departed the Muizenberg garrison again consisted of a sergeant and seven soldiers.¹⁸⁶

4.4. Military Land Forces of the Cape

4.4.1. The Cape Garrison

By the late eighteenth century the personnel organisation of the VOC started to show serious cracks. Malaria epidemics caused a high personnel turnover in Batavia and though thousands of troops were dispatched on a yearly basis, they soon perished in the harsh Batavian climate, making the VOC even more dependent on local troops.¹⁸⁷ At the Cape, no indigenous regular military unit existed and the weakest point in its defence was the chronic shortage of soldiers. Commissioner Hendrik Breton, who visited the Cape in 1784, remarked that though the organisation of the Cape military establishment was good, it was totally insufficient in terms of its scope and size to defend the Cape against an enemy from the sea, "... veel minder te verdedigen tegen een uitheemschen vyand...".¹⁸⁸

The Council of Policy was concerned about the small number of troops at the Cape and considered a garrison of between 4000 and 5000 men as adequate. When asked his opinion, Gordon reported that 6000 troops were necessary to defend the Cape properly due to the extended area. He added that without sufficient troops it would be difficult to defend the Cape

¹⁸⁵ NAN 1.01.50 – 1235, Memorie concerneerende den staat van deffensie van de Caap de Goede Hoop, geformeerd door den Goeverneur Van de Graaff, in den Jaare 1787, 24/9/1787, p.29.

¹⁸⁶ D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, p.346.

¹⁸⁷ R. Raben, 'Het Aziatisch Legioen' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.199.

during a siege because of its lack of large permanent fortifications.¹⁸⁹ These requests for a larger garrison had no effect due to the economic condition of the VOC and its severe manpower problems. By 1790, the *Heeren XVII* had approved 600 infantrymen for the *Nationaal Bataillon* and 400 men for the Artillery Corps,¹⁹⁰ while a few years earlier (in 1785) they also approved that a *Pepinieren*, or soldiers' depot with up to 400 soldiers under training for deployment in the East, could be maintained at the Cape.¹⁹¹

An important military change in the organisation of the Garrison was the creation of a so-called *Jager Corps* in June 1785. The VOC war against Kandy led to a number of military changes in the VOC, notably the formation of a separate *Jager Corps* in 1764, which was an elite group of sharp shooters that wore distinguishable green uniforms.¹⁹² The introduction of light troops was consistent with changes in the European military system at the time, as light infantry and light cavalry started to play an increasingly important role as scouts, skirmishers and sharpshooters.¹⁹³ Gordon thought it important to create such a unit at the Cape and stated it should also include mounted *jagers* or dragoons ("Jagers te Paard") within the Garrison so that they could perform both a light infantry and a cavalry role. Such troops could be armed with short sabres and carbines (easier to handle on horseback) and should be organised into four companies of 50 men. Gordon was well aware of the military literature of his time and motivated his argument with references to specific pages from the *Reveries* of Marshal de Saxe, published in 1757.¹⁹⁴ The *Jager Corps* that was established at the Cape was not cavalry, but infantry. It formed the fifth company of the *Nationaal Bataillon* and consisted of close to a 100 men.¹⁹⁵

The *Nationaal Bataillon* was maintained at just under 500 men during the late 1780's; including the *jagers* and the twelve dragoons that formed the Governor's lifeguard.¹⁹⁶ It peaked at the end of the decade, when the *Nationaal Bataillon* mustered around 493 soldiers, 27 Corporals, 28 Sergeants, 10 cadets, 18 bandsmen and 30 officers.¹⁹⁷ The Meuron Regiment (at

¹⁸⁸ Quoted in A.J. Boeseken, *Nederlandse Kommissarisse*, p.103.

¹⁸⁹ C178, Resolutiën, 2/5/1788, pp.83-118; and C181, Resolutiën, 13/1/1789, pp.2-88, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁹⁰ C191, Resolutiën, 15/2/1791, pp.260-347, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁹¹ H.C.V. Leibbrandt and J.E. Heeres, *Memorien van den Gouverneur Van de Graaf*, pp.25-6.

¹⁹² R. Raben, 'Het Aziatisch Legioen' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.200.

¹⁹³ G. Parker, *The Military Revolution*, pp.149-50.

¹⁹⁴ CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, pp. 84-7.

¹⁹⁵ C171, Resolutiën, 4/4/1786, pp.79-106; and C181, Resolutiën, 13/1/1789, pp.2-88, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁹⁶ CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, p.35.

¹⁹⁷ C178, Resolutiën, 2/5/1788, pp.83-118; and C181, Resolutiën, 13/1/1789, pp.2-88, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

the Cape to 1788) consisted of about 1100 men,¹⁹⁸ while the Württemberg Regiment that replaced the Meuron Regiment, was just under 2000 strong. This meant that, including the artillery, Gordon had close to 3000 men under his command by 1789.¹⁹⁹ However, soon afterwards, it was much less again.

Besides a shortage of men, material, the other essential element in war, was also lacking. One of the big qualms Gordon still had, was the poor quality muskets they had to make do with. He first requested new muskets in April 1780 and the *Heeren XVII* assured Van Plettenberg that 1200 new muskets were on the way. Yet, due to the war it never arrived. Gordon was dissatisfied and notified the Committee for Secret Affairs in 1786 that they never received the previous consignment of muskets. He fiercely complained to Commissioner Boesses about the very poor state of the infantry weapons (“allerslegtsten Staat van de Infanterij wapenen”) in January 1787, and requested that they issue the Cape with the muskets used by the Dutch infantry. He asked for 6000 muskets (for both the garrison and the militia), as it was also necessary to maintain a reserve for an emergency.²⁰⁰

Gordon was very specific about the type of musket best suited for South African conditions. He dispatched examples of the various weapons with which soldiers were equipped to the Netherlands and added specific notations on their shortcomings and strong points. Muskets with short barrels, such as the *Zeeland* musket (“Zeeuwsche snaphanen”) of 1786, could be dangerous for those using it as its butt was too short and the barrel so short that it would be possible for those serving in the back rank, to wound those in the front rank. If a musket’s ramrod was too thin, it could jam between the cartridge and the barrel. The musket that Gordon suggested for the Cape was the one with which the recruits that arrived aboard the *Leviathan* in 1787, were armed. He was very impressed by the fact that the musket was strongly made, with a good lock mechanism and a well designed ramrod. This weapon was considered ideal, except that the butt could have been an inch longer and the barrel and bayonet could also have been a few inches longer. The wood of the stock must be made stronger for the warmer and dryer conditions at the Cape, as it often cracked.²⁰¹ Gordon was therefore very meticulous about the specifications for the infantry weapons best suited for operational use at the Cape.

¹⁹⁸ CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, p.35.

¹⁹⁹ C.J. Barnard, Robert Jacob Gordon se Loopbaan aan die Kaap, p.394.

²⁰⁰ CA C174, Resolusiën, 26/1/1787 pp.124; and C1293, Memorien en Rapporten, 1787, R.J. Gordon, 26/1/1787, pp.51-2.

On 18 May 1787 Gordon reiterated his deep concern (“grievende bekommering”) with the weapons of the garrison and stated that the garrison required at least 6000 good muskets. Gordon again discussed the merits of the various muskets, but stated that those used by the Dutch infantry would suffice. Since the security of the Cape was dependent on it, he could not emphasise it enough.²⁰² The Council of Policy supported Gordon’s suggestions strongly and asked the VOC for a sufficient numbers of weapons with the alterations requested by Gordon.²⁰³

A year later they were still waiting. When the ship *De Vrede* arrived at the Cape with a musket consignment for the VOC’s armoury in Batavia, Gordon asked the Governor’s permission to seize it. Though they were of inferior quality, Gordon at least had the comfort that “een slegt geweer beeter als geen”.²⁰⁴ He certainly went to much trouble to try and find an infantry weapon best suited for local conditions, yet there is no proof that the requested muskets were ever received.

The same situation pertained to tents for the troops. On 18 May 1787 Gordon stated that there were only a hundred tents in the armoury. As they were small and in a bad condition (many were rotten because of regular use during the war), he asked for more tents, designed a new tent suited to the Cape climate and meticulously calculated the amount of sailcloth necessary.²⁰⁵ They apparently never received anything.²⁰⁶

The Cape was also important because of its healthy climate and soldiers that were ill, or suffering from disease, could recuperate at the Cape before continuing their voyage to the East or Europe. Yet, Gordon was not always happy about the health and fitness of his soldiers. He complained in 1787 that many were too old for the rocky and mountainous environment (“bergagtige klipperige Land”) they had to serve in, some of the recruits that arrived were physically not up to military service, while he needed healthy and young men (“gesonde en sterke liede nodig”).²⁰⁷ However, by 1790 his infantry was limited to 600 men, the Württemberg Regiment had to depart to the East, and it was very difficult to maintain troop numbers. Once more the defence of the Cape depended only on the Garrison and militia.

²⁰¹ CA C174, Resolutiën, 18/5/1787, pp.437-41 and 448-9; C1294, Memoriën en Rapporten, R.J. Gordon, 12/5/1787, pp.62-5; and C1856, Uitgaande Secreete Brieven, Council of Policy – *Heeren XVII*, 15/6/1787, pp.65-6.

²⁰² CA C1294, Memoriën en Rapporten, R.J. Gordon, 12/5/1787, pp.62-5.

²⁰³ CA C174, Resolutiën, 18/5/1787, pp.437-41 and 448-9; and C1856, Uitgaande Secreete Brieven, Council of Policy – *Heeren XVII*, 15/6/1787, pp.53-6.

²⁰⁴ CA C178, Resolutiën, 14/5/1788, p.147.

²⁰⁵ CA C174, Resolutiën, 18/5/1787, pp.441-2.

²⁰⁶ C.J. Barnard : Robert Jacob Gordon se Loopbaan aan die Kaap, p.400.

²⁰⁷ CA C1294, Memoriën en Rapporten, R.J. Gordon, 12/5/1787, p.65.

4.4.2. The Pepinieren

The origin of the idea to have a soldiers' depot for the East at the Cape is uncertain, but Cloppenburg already suggested that it should be established at the Cape in 1769.²⁰⁸ Fifteen years later Van Braam considered the Cape as ideal to act as a magazine and military depot to support operations in the East. Sailors and soldiers should recuperate in the healthy climate at the Cape and then go to the East; which would provide the VOC with healthy manpower.²⁰⁹ In May 1784 Gordon wrote to the *Heeren XVII* that a magazine and military training facility should be established at the Cape, so that soldiers could acclimatize and undergo training before going to the East.²¹⁰ In 1786 Gordon stated that training and preparing troops at the Cape with its abundance of fresh produce, would bring casualty figures amongst soldiers down and save the VOC money. Therefore, healthy, well-nourished and trained soldiers would be dispatched to any VOC possession in the East, while it will also bolster the defence of the Cape.²¹¹ In 1785 the *Heeren XVII* decided that a so-called *Pepinieren* (or often referred to by the French term, *Pépinière*) consisting of no more than 400 soldiers could be maintained at the Cape. During their stay they had to get used to a warmer climate and receive weapons training ("in de wapenhandel te oeffenen").²¹² During his visit in 1787 Boesses supported the creation of the *Pepinieren*.²¹³

The *Pepinieren* was placed under the command of two former officers of the Meuron Regiment, Captain Baron De Bonstetten and Captain Simon De Sandol-Roy. Due to differences with Colonel De Meuron, they had left the regiment and joined the VOC in November 1787. De Bonstetten was referred to as the training commander, but he soon afterwards returned to Switzerland because the VOC refused to promote him to Major. De Sandol-Roy took over command of the *Pepinieren* in February 1788 and was promoted to Major a year later.²¹⁴ By May 1788 the corps consisted of 208 men. The recruits performed normal military duties and exercised twice daily to bring them to the same level as the garrison. As they were a training

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- ²⁰⁸ CA VC95, J.W. Cloppenburg, Anotatien en Remarques op het Caabse Gouvernement, pp.v-vi, xiv.
²⁰⁹ CA VC121, Van Braam, Memorien en Aanmerkingen over den Staat der Colonie, pp.12, 15-6 and 24.
²¹⁰ CA VC64, Memorie aan Zijne Hoogheid van de Militaire Commissie, 25/9/1789, Bylagen, Litt E, p.303.
²¹¹ CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, pp.47-9.
²¹² H.C.V. Leibbrandt and J.E. Heeres, *Memorien van den Gouverneur Van de Graaff*, pp.25-6.
²¹³ C174, Resolutiën, 26/1/1787 pp.124-52, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).
²¹⁴ A. Linder, *The Swiss Regiment Meuron*, pp.79 and 82.

unit, it was important to have good officers and sufficient NCO's to maintain discipline and handle training.²¹⁵

The status and management of the *Pepinieren* was a point of disagreement between Gordon and Van de Graaff. By January 1789 it had 195 men, but all was not well.²¹⁶ Gordon wanted the soldiers to be attached to the Garrison for the purpose of the defence of the Cape, specifically as some of the soldiers were already at the Cape for more than three years.²¹⁷ Van de Graaff did not agree. Gordon became antagonistic towards the *Pepinieren* and very critical of the way in which Van de Graaff handled it. In February 1789 he complained that the *Pepinieren* was in chaos, it had no proper control or discipline and he believed that De Sandol-Roy had to be investigated as he overcharged the soldiers for many of the items they required. Gordon wanted to keep his battalion up to strength with recruits from the *Pepinieren*, but was not allowed by the Van de Graaff who ordered him to "pull" men from the ships. Gordon then argued that the *Pepinieren* should be closed down, his battalion should be supplemented from it, while the rest of the men must go to the Indies where they had a shortage of soldiers.²¹⁸

Soon afterwards, Van de Graaff protested to the Council of Policy about Gordon's accusations, while Gordon replied that he only served the interests of the VOC. Van de Graaff then changed his tack and stated that he had foreseen the command problems as well as the irregularities with pay and as a result he resolved to appoint additional NCO's. The *Pepinieren* would now have two sergeants and four corporals for every 100 men, instead of one sergeant and two corporals.²¹⁹ Van de Graaff again emphasised the value of maintaining the *Pepinieren*, yet Gordon did not agree, even though he had proposed it to the *Heeren XVII* a few years earlier. His perception was probably clouded by the tension between him and De Sandol-Roy.

In November 1789 Gordon complained bitterly about promotions that took place in the *Pepinieren* without his consent, specifically as the Secunde and a few other members of the Council of Policy were also not present when the Governor approved it. Gordon then made a submission to the Council stating that De Sandol-Roy had shown poor discipline, as an officer he was not an example to others and that his conduct was under investigation.²²⁰ Gordon was not at the meeting, but Le Sueur presented the petition on his behalf. In his dispute with De

²¹⁵ C178, Resolutiën, 2/5/1788, pp.83-118, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²¹⁶ C181, Resolutiën, 13/1/1789, pp.2-88, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²¹⁷ S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, Vaillant – Van der Hoop, 1/7/1789, p.175.

²¹⁸ C181, Resolutiën, 6/2/1789, pp.182-197, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²¹⁹ C181, Resolutiën, 6/3/1789, pp.280-305 and C182, Resolutiën, pp.2-22, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²²⁰ C184, Resolutiën, 13/11/1789, pp.2-41, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

Sandol-Roy, Gordon never used De Sandol-Roy's full name, referring to him as "Capitein Sandol" instead – apparently refusing to add "De" or "Roy" to his name.

The dispute continued. De Sandol-Roy in effect admitted that disciplinary problems and command difficulties existed in the *Pepinieren* and requested new promotions due to these problems.²²¹ Yet, he was not charged or replaced, and the *Pepinieren* did not become part of the Garrison as Gordon required. The whole affair is indicative of the poor relationship between Gordon and the Van de Graaff circle, and was never really resolved. In February the *Heeren XVII* ordered the closure of the *Pepinieren*, while its troops and Major De Sandol-Roy was ordered to the Indies at the first opportunity.²²²

4.4.3. The Military Kweekschool

A lack of professional officers (both seagoing and military) was one of the most enduring problems of the VOC. Van Imhoff recognised the need for improved scientific and theoretical training for officers and created a naval school in Batavia. However, despite the fact that it produced a number of seagoing officers for the VOC, it closed in 1755 due to financial limitations. By 1780 the VOC's shortage of trained artilleryists had become severe; at Semarang for example, the artillery complement consisted of only one officer, three or four bombardiers and eight assistants. As De long stated, this was typical of the inability of the VOC at the time; "Achteloosheid, ongeoeffendheid en onkunde vierden bij hen hoogtij".²²³ Consequently a "Kweekschool" (Academy) opened in Batavia in February 1782. Almost immediately it had about 30 students and though it was created to train artilleryists, it soon provided tuition in the nautical science and also became a "Marineschool" (Naval Academy). Cadets did a three year course that included subjects like Mathematics, Geometry, Trigonometry, Artillery Science and Nautical Science.²²⁴ This academy was very valuable, received much praise and it even survived the demise of the VOC to become an academy for army and navy officers.

The Cape also had a shortage of trained soldiers in the technical services (artilleryists and engineers) as insufficient competent officers were recruited in Europe. The VOC therefore suggested that officers recruited into the artillery and engineering dispensation be trained "on the job". Van de Graaff thought it provided an opportunity to train cadets from good backgrounds in the military sciences at the Cape under the direction of Gilquin. In July 1785 he

²²¹ C190, Resolutiën, 15/12/1790, pp.417-94, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²²² C191, Resolutiën, 15/2/1791, pp.260-347, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²²³ D. De long, *Het Krijgswezen onder de Oostindische Compagnie*, p.171.

explained to the Council of Policy that he and Gilquin had worked out the concept for a “Militaire Kweekschool” and that it would be possible to produce cadets that were well trained and educated in the military sciences and capable of being appointed as officers after the completion of their course.²²⁵ Cadets had to be appointed at a salary of f20 per month, two to three cadets had to be detached to the infantry and between four and six to the artillery. The creation of a *Kweekschool*, Van de Graaff maintained, would not only be of value to the Cape, but would also address the shortage of competent officers in the Indies.²²⁶

In April 1786 the Council of Policy decided to go ahead and establish the *Kweekschool*, while they were awaiting approval from the *Heeren XVII*. It was thought that cadets could be appointed in Europe and then train at the Cape, while capable individuals would be recruited as cadets from the Garrison and at the Cape, “uit goeden Huijzen alhier ... Vlug en Schrande van begrip”.²²⁷ They argued that if residents of the Cape were successful in the military service, it might motivate others. Soon, regulations, that provided the managing guidelines of the *Kweekschool* and dictated the conduct of cadets, were drawn up. Classes were scheduled to take place from 09:00 to 11:00, during which time the cadets would be exempted from other military responsibilities. Cadets that were often absent, or did not progress with their studies, would be removed from the course. The focus of the curriculum would be on Arithmetic, Algebra or “Stelkonst”, Geometry and the principles of the military science. Artillery NCO’s would be allowed to attend classes on the premise that they receive permission from their officers and did not neglect their work.²²⁸

The Council of Policy decided in August 1786 that the Governor would be the Controlling Authority of the new *Kweekschool*, while the cadets would be under the command of Gilquin. Lieutenant Thibault was appointed as Director (*Directeur*) of the *Kweekschool*, and Ensign (“extra ordinair Vuurwerker”) Justus Hendrik Gunkel, from the ship *Stralen* was appointed as lecturer.²²⁹ As they had the adequate training, education and background, Thibault and Gunkel had to create the curriculum, prepare the lecture room and present the classes. Thibault provided good service to the VOC, was invaluable for the improvement of the fortifications and was considered a good example to younger people. Since he served as a military engineer and

²²⁴ D. De long, *Het Krijgswezen onder de Oostindische Compagnie*, pp.170-3.

²²⁵ C169, Resolutiën, 13/7/1785, pp.30-50, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²²⁶ C169, Resolutiën, 5/8/1785, pp.87-111, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²²⁷ C171, Resolutiën, 19/4/1786, pp.118-277, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²²⁸ H.C.V. Leibbrandt, *Precis of the Archives of the Cape of Good Hope, Requesten (Memorials) 1715-1806*, Volume II, p.806.

²²⁹ C172, Resolutiën, 4/8/1786, pp.240-288, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

had to perform additional duties at the *Kweekschool*, he received an extra remuneration of f50 per month.²³⁰

Care was taken to select intelligent cadets, well-suited for the challenges of the type of training they had to undergo. By May 1788 there were altogether 10 cadets attached to the Garrison, but it is not clear from the sources if they were all students at the *Kweekschool*.²³¹ The cadets used instruments that were purchased from the estate of a military engineer that had passed away.²³² The Castle was too full to house the *Kweekschool* and it was accommodated in a rather inadequate and square summerhouse, which was not at all suited for it. Van de Graaff stated that a special building had to be erected for the school in due course and land was set aside for it. The *Kweekschool* had to be placed on a secure footing, so that its products could be on par with the officer cadets of the Meuron and Luxemburg Regiments.²³³

The *Heeren XVII* was not as impressed as Commissioner Boessen with all the goings-on at the Cape and stated that the Council of Policy went further than they should have with the creation of the *Kweekschool*. They were especially perturbed that their original intention to provide additional training for a number of artillerists and engineers were so embroidered upon that, without prior approval, it ended up in the creation of a facility to provide “Militaire educatie aan Kaabsche kinderen”.²³⁴ The cadets had to receive their normal pay of f12 (instead of f20) and the land Van de Graaff set aside for the school, had to be sold.²³⁵

The *Kweekschool* was finally ordered to close down in accordance with the notorious orders from the *Heeren XVII*, issued on 2 October 1790: “...om van stonden aan afte schaffen het zoogenaamde Cadettenschool”.²³⁶ All its belongings had to be sold, while its instrument had to be made available to the military engineers. Thibault had to pay back the extra remuneration he received, while Gunkel had to go to Samarang, to the Marine School, where his talents could be well used (“ten nutte besteeden”).²³⁷

²³⁰ C178, Resolutiën, 17/6/1788, pp.303-50, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).
²³¹ C178, Resolutiën, 2/5/1788, pp.83-118, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed during 2005).
²³² C177, Resolutiën, 18/3/1788, pp.364-402, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).
²³³ C178, Resolutiën, 17/6/1788, pp.303-50, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).
²³⁴ CA C572, Inkomende Brieven, *Heeren XVII* – Council of Policy, 8/1/1788, pp.107-8.
²³⁵ C178, Resolutiën, 17/6/1788, pp.303-50, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).
²³⁶ C191, Resolutiën, 15/2/1791, pp.260-374, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).
²³⁷ CA C587, Inkomende Brieven, *Heeren XVII* – Council of Policy, 4/1/1791, pp.57-8; and C198, Resolutiën, 29/11/1791, pp.221-310, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

4.4.4. The Cape Militia

An issue that was often used as motivation for maintaining a larger body of regular troops at the Cape was the fact that the militia might not be able to arrive quick enough in an emergency. Gordon used the example of De Suffren's arrival in 1781. He stated that the fleet was sighted at 10:30 and could have been in Table Bay at 13:30, which was too short notice for the burghers from the districts, even with the best will, to arrive at the Cape in time.²³⁸ He explained to the *Heeren XVII* that though the militia reacted well to the general call-up, this might not always be the case due to the security situation in the interior, as their possessions could be raided or stolen, their wives and children killed by the Xhosas or the San, or their slaves could create havoc while they were away. In addition it was usually only possible to mobilise the militia for a short while.²³⁹ Such problems were typical of the weaknesses that plagued part time forces.

A new militia unit, the *Korps der Vryen* was created in 1787, and consisted of persons of mixed blood and illegitimate children, born outside slavery. During exercises of the Stellenbosch militia some burghers refused to serve under Corporal Johannes Hartogh, as he was black; "swartagtig van couleur en van heydenen afkomstig ...".²⁴⁰ Due to a request from the *Burgherkrijgsraad* a separate militia company was created for those "...buiten slavernije geboren, maar niet uit gewettigde Huwelijken voortgesproten zijnde, al van ouds hunnen dienst neevens de burghers niet hebben kunnen presteeren".²⁴¹ Promotions and appointments had to be the same then in the rest of the militia, while the unit had to exercise and participate in revues with the militia.²⁴² On 4 July the *Burgherkrijgsraad* appointed H.O. Eksteen as its Captain, while J.F. Bernardi and J.A. Horak were appointed as Lieutenants and H. Smuts as Ensign.²⁴³ The NCO's were black, or of mixed blood. This was significant because it indicated an apparent increase in racial consciousness as people of mixed blood had up to this point served in the regular burgher militia units. This unit was for those that were not white and had a lower rank, and they were no longer integrated on an equal footing in military units. However, to the

²³⁸ CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, p.26.

²³⁹ CA VC117, Gordon, Beredeneerde Memorie, 1786, p.37.

²⁴⁰ H. Giliomee and R. Elphick (eds), *'n Samelewing in Wording*, p.563-4. See also H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p.51.

²⁴¹ C174, Resolutiën, 26/1/1787 pp.124-152, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁴² C174, Resolutiën, 26/1/1787 pp.124-152, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁴³ C175, Resolutiën, 14/7/1787, pp.99-157, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

annoyance of those ordered to be in the new unit, other persons of mixed blood continued to serve in the regular militia.²⁴⁴

By 1789 Cape Town had about 2893 militiamen in total, organised into seven infantry companies and 250 dragoons; Stellenbosch had four dragoon companies and one infantry company; Swellendam had two dragoon companies and no infantry; and Graaff-Reinet had three dragoon companies and no infantry.²⁴⁵ Van de Graaff viewed the burgher militia with pessimism and was sarcastic about their military proficiency, stating that they had no idea of the realities of the military duties they might have to fulfil.²⁴⁶

New Standing Orders for the Stellenbosch militia was promulgated in June 1790 which provided strict guidelines for its constitution and organisation. It had to consist of five cavalry companies, each with a Captain in command, two Lieutenants, one Cornet, four *Wagtmeesters*, four Corporals, one standard bearer, one roll call holder, four trumpeters and two Adjutants. The *Burgherkrijgsraad* was responsible for maintaining the signal system and its guns, while burghers between sixteen and sixty (except heemraden, elders, deacons, and the fire masters) were eligible for militia service. Men between sixteen and eighteen were relieved from piquet duty and military expeditions, but had to participate in the parades and exercises. Each man had to provide his own muskets, a pair of pistols and an ammunition bag. The whole militia had to assemble for yearly exercises in October (six days) and in case of war or an attack on the Cape, they could be called up to serve in Cape Town for an indefinite period.²⁴⁷ The signal system was inspected in January 1791, but many of the signal guns were rusted or in a bad condition and could explode when fired, as some guns were in their positions for more than 40 years.²⁴⁸ The organisation of the militia was placed on a secure footing, but the signal system had to be revamped.

4.4.5. Coastal Defence and Outposts

As the centre of power at the Cape was Cape Town, any serious attack would have to be directed at it. Van de Graaff thought that the most likely landing places for an enemy force was

²⁴⁴ V.C. Malherbe, 'The Khoekhoe Soldier at the Cape of Good Hope' in *Military History Journal*, 12 (3) 2002, p.96; and H. Giliomee and R. Elphick (eds), *'n Samelewing in Wording*, pp.563-4.

²⁴⁵ P.M. Grobbelaar, *Die Ontstaan van 'n Westerse Militêre Tradisie aan die Kaap*, p.116.

²⁴⁶ NAN 1.01.50 – 1189, *Eenige Missiven ...*, Van de Graaff – Stadhouder, 28/1/1791.

²⁴⁷ C187, *Resolutiën*, 1/6/1790, *Reglement ordre en Instrúctie waar na den Bürger Kreygs raad van Stellenbosch Zich zal heben te gedraagen*, pp.216-83, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

Table Bay, False Bay, Hout Bay, Kamptz Bay or around Mouille Point. Saldanha Bay was a last alternative as a force that landed there would have to be big (8000 to 10000 men) with much logistic support to be able to wage a campaign against the Cape.²⁴⁹ Yet, as the Cape colony had a long coastline with many possible landing sites, the Cape was ordered to guard the bays around the coast, as the *Heeren XVII* were worried that other powers might become convinced of the possibilities the coast offered and establish themselves somewhere.²⁵⁰

Van de Graaff considered Robben Island as open to an attack, stating that it could be taken by only two frigates, supply a whole force and then act as a launching pad for a further attack on the Cape. He wanted to fortify the island and made an officer, Lieutenant Van Baalen, instead of a Sergeant, Commandant of it in 1785. However, to place an officer on the island was a waste of manpower and the VOC ordered Van de Graaff to do away with the title and appointment.²⁵¹

Three months after Van de Graaff arrived at the Cape the British East Indiamen *Pigot*, which departed from Madras on 2 February, was in distress and anchored at St Franciskus baaij (or Kromme Riviersbaay at the mouth of the Kromme River) on 7 May 1785.²⁵² She put 100 sick men ashore and for a few weeks the crew and passengers onboard were sumptuously treated by local burghers, while the ship was repaired and replenished. The passengers included several military officers, including a certain Lieutenant-Colonel William Dalrymple (an engineer) and a Lieutenant Pemberton. Some of the passengers (five men, two ladies, four children and a couple of servants), rented a wagon from local farmers and travelled overland to Cape Town, while Dalrymple compiled a detailed reconnaissance report of the colony.²⁵³ The *Pigot* departed on 30 May and arrived in False Bay on 9 June 1785 (not July as historians often reported).²⁵⁴

What concerned the Cape authorities greatly was that Landdrost Van Rijnveld in Swellendam was only notified about the British presence a month after their arrival. Frederick Potgieter, who accommodated to the British sick, was summoned to the Cape to explain why he did not notify the Landdrost immediately about the foreigners.²⁵⁵ Furthermore, the Council of

²⁴⁸ C191, Resolutiën, 11/1/1791, Rutz – Van de Graaff, 10/1/1791, pp.4-64, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁴⁹ NAN 1.01.50 – 1235, Memorie concerneerende den staat van deffensie van de Caap de Goede Hoop, geformeerd door den Goeverneur Van de Graaff, in den Jaare 1787, 24/9/1787, p.35.

²⁵⁰ CA C577, Inkomende Brieven, *Heeren XVII* – Van de Graaff, 31/12/1789, pp.82-3.

²⁵¹ CA C562, Inkomende Brieven, Alting – Van de Graaff, 25/10/1785, p.37; and C.168, Resolutiën, 4/5/1785, pp.441-70, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁵² C168, Resolutiën, 17/6/1785, pp.494-524, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁵³ C.J. Barnard, Robert Jacob Gordon se Loopbaan aan die Kaap, p.408.

²⁵⁴ C168, Resolutiën, 17/6/1785, pp.494-524, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁵⁵ D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, p.620.

Policy considered the group that moved overland as spies and felt that the incident illustrated the vulnerability of the southern Cape Coast. They knew that their former allies, the French, had detailed military maps of the Cape, and now the British probably had the same information.

The French were also worried about Dalrymple's visit. In October 1785 Percheron, wrote to De Castries, that the British might wish to "establish themselves in this coast ... Colonel Dalrymple ... appears to confirm our fears ...". Percheron was critical of the Dutch, stating that they would throw everything in the balance, if money could be made; "They lose perspective and are then no longer the same people... The British will certainly not fail to seduce them in this way".²⁵⁶ Gordon had much contact with Dalrymple, spoke highly of him and was convinced that he "took with him the most precise notes on all the possible ways to take possession of the Cape".²⁵⁷ Both Dalrymple and Pemberton did write reports. Dalrymple was very specific, advising Henry Dundas on "essential information relative to the mode of attacking the Cape of Good Hope if the French have thrown troops into the Cape Town". In it he mentioned the dissatisfaction with the VOC control and provided information on the coastline of the Cape, the various places a force could disembark as well as the military organisation of the Cape. Gordon, he said, had "an English heart, tho born in Holland and is strong in the Prince of Orange's interest".²⁵⁸

The French view of the British motives was not far-fetched. When a new French East India Company was created in 1785, a vague possibility existed that it might amalgamate with the VOC. This made British statesmen quite jittery as they feared a French-Dutch alliance aimed at overthrowing British power in India, which would pose serious problems if the French base at Mauritius were linked to Ceylon (Trincomalee specifically) and the Cape. In fact, when the crisis in the Netherlands arose (in 1787), the British Prime Minister, William Pitt, ordered Lord Cornwallis in India to take Trincomalee immediately if war broke out, while a British expedition would attack the Cape. Pitt was emphatic that Britain would not allow France to control the Netherlands and thereby add sufficiently to her maritime capability and aggressive power in India. Strategically Britain urgently required bases in both these focal areas (Ceylon and the Cape), an aspect so crucial that by 1785 British statesman considered establishing a naval base along the southern or eastern coast of the Cape (Algoa Bay was specifically considered).²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ H. R. de Puyfontaine, *Louis Michel Thibault*, p.7.

²⁵⁷ H. R. de Puyfontaine, *Louis Michel Thibault*, p.7n.

²⁵⁸ Lt Pemberton's report is in the Pitt Papers, quoted in M. Arkin, *John Company at the Cape*, p.190. See also H. R. de Puyfontaine, *Louis Michel Thibault*, p.7.

²⁵⁹ H.W. Richmond, *Statesmen and Sea Power*, pp.163-4.

The urgent Dalrymple matter ("van 't aller uitterste gewigt") spurred the Council of Policy into action and they resolved to post soldiers to Mossel Bay, Plettenberg's Bay and Algoa Bay. One hundred men had to be taken from ships to strengthen the garrison, while the force they placed out would consist of 100 soldiers, 12 dragoons, officers and NCO's.²⁶⁰ The High Council of Indies approved the three posts and regarded it as a secret matter, but ordered Van de Graaff not to take soldiers from ships destined for the East.²⁶¹

Mossel Bay was valuable because of the organised agriculture in the area and the fact that it provided an anchorage. The designated Commander of the new outpost at Mossel Bay (a Sergeant) received his instructions on 11 October 1785 and by January 1786 the soldiers had already established the post. They had to patrol the area, report on all passing ships and provide assistance to all visiting VOC ships. Foreign ships could only be assisted in an emergency and they had to report the type of ship, its armament and purpose without delay. No foreigners were allowed into the interior and if necessary they had to be prevented by force. In case of a foreign attack, the Landdrost in Swellendam had to call-up the burghers in the area to assist with the defence.²⁶² A grain store was soon afterwards erected and in July 1788 the first corn was shipped to Batavia, while at the same time a British ship destined for Botany Bay (Australia) also bought corn.²⁶³ Though it is uncertain how many soldiers were stationed here, the military occupation of Mossel Bay was of value to the VOC and added to the security of the coast.

Plettenberg Bay had no real strategic value for an attacker as it was too far from the Cape Town and there was no developed agriculture in the region. However, with much water, wood and fertile soil, it was a good location for a refreshment station. The bay had an open anchorage that afforded little protection, but the VOC wished to prevent its competitors from using it, as cruisers could then refresh here and interdict shipping from the East. Soldiers were stationed in the bay, but in accordance with the orders from the High Council of Indies, the military presence at Plettenberg Bay was secret and the regular muster rolls do not indicate exactly how many soldiers served at the post.²⁶⁴ Wood was always a scarce commodity at the Cape. As a result Plettenberg Bay was of much value to the VOC because wood, including palisades for maintaining the fortifications, was shipped from there to the Cape since the late

²⁶⁰ CA C168, Resolutiën, 17/6/1785, pp.518-23; C169, Resolutiën, 5/8/1785, pp.109-110; and C169, Resolutiën, 26/8/1785, pp.126-7.

²⁶¹ CA C562, Inkomende Brieven, Alting – Van de Graaff, 26/10/1785, p.37; and C563, Inkomende Brieven, Alting – Van de Graaff, 20/10/1786, pp.282-3.

²⁶² D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, pp.602-3 and 613, is an important source.

²⁶³ *Briefwisseling van Hendrik Swellengrebel*, Cloete - Swellengrebel, 29/3/1790, p.282.

1780's.²⁶⁵ By May 1791, the military post in Plettenberg Bay was reduced and consisted only of two NCO's and ten soldiers.²⁶⁶

The Dutch were not particularly interested in St Helena Bay (north of Saldanha Bay) and it was never seen as a possible landing site for an enemy force. Yet, ships did put into the bay in an emergency and they wished to prevent other powers from establishing them in St Helena Bay during wartime. As a result an outpost was created in the bay between 1734 and 1736, and again from 1746 to 1749. From April 1781 until the end of the war, two soldiers from the Groene Cloof outpost maintained a lookout for British ships at St Helena Bay.²⁶⁷ In an effort to improve the security of the Cape, Van de Graaff ordered the farmers around St Helena Bay to report the arrival of ships to the Cape. In 1786 a British frigate took in water and provisions in St Helena Bay and as Van de Graaff was worried about the whale hunting and other economic activities by foreign ships in the bay, the military post was reopened in August 1787. The soldiers had to prevent whale hunting and illicit trade with foreign ships, they were only allowed to provide foreigners with water (more provisions had to be acquired at the Cape), while foreigners had to be prevented from coming ashore, if necessary by force.²⁶⁸ When the soldiers arrived at St Helena Bay in September, there was a British ship in the bay and they had to prevent its crewmembers from coming ashore a number of times. Whale hunting in the bay continued and by February 1789 there were 36 ships engaged in it.²⁶⁹ As farmers received poor prices for their produce at the Cape, much smuggling with the whale ships that frequented the bay took place, something which the soldiers at the post found very difficult to control.²⁷⁰

The post house in Saldanha Bay was completely rebuilt after its destruction in 1781. The Post Holder and his seven soldiers still had to provide a general service to ships, report all visitors and make military observations. When a number of outposts were closed in 1791, Saldanha was maintained because of the bay's value to shipping.²⁷¹ However, it still had no defences, which was probably due to its distance from Cape Town. Even if an enemy did land at Saldanha Bay, it implied a long and arduous campaign through an arid countryside with sandy terrain.

²⁶⁴ D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, pp.617 and 631.

²⁶⁵ C177, Resolusiën, 22/1/1788, pp.57-142, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁶⁶ CA C192, Resolusiën, 10/5/1791, p.146.

²⁶⁷ A.P. Roux, *Die Geskiedenis van Saldanhabaai, St Helenabaai en Dasseneiland*, pp.84-7.

²⁶⁸ CA C2351, Instructiën, Ordre en Instructie dienende tot narigt van den officier die zig aan 't hoofd van enige militairen Manschappen na de St Helena Baay ..., 25/8/1787, pp.42-6.

²⁶⁹ D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, pp.476-7.

²⁷⁰ S.D. Naude (ed), *Kaapse Plakkaatboek IV*, 24/2/1792, pp.93-4; and A.P. Roux, *Die Geskiedenis van Saldanhabaai, St Helenabaai en Dasseneiland*, p.88.

²⁷¹ D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, p.466.

5. FOREIGN REGIMENTS AT THE CAPE

5.1. The Swiss Regiment De Meuron

Military service at the Cape was often monotonous as troops performed garrison duties, guarded the coast and did duties at the various military buildings and fortifications. With not much to do, soldiers drank a great deal, amused themselves and quarrelled from time to time. Morale was often bad amongst the troops, which was made worse by the poor pay they received. As a result punishment was harsh and troops often deserted, irrespective of the consequences they might suffer. During their first year at the Cape 45 soldiers of the Meuron Regiment deserted. Though the first 30 deserters were caught, the fate of the others is unknown. In March 1786 four troublemakers of the Meuron Regiment were again despatched to Batavia for five years, while four soldiers from the Garrison were taken into the regiment.²⁷² As the regiment was under strength when they left France, new recruits were steadily despatched to join it. Of these about 120 died on the voyage to the Cape, while a further 162 either deserted soon afterwards, or died during the next year. When the regiment departed to Ceylon in February 1788, it therefore had only 800 men and its Colonel, Pierre-Frédéric de Meuron, warned his brother Charles-Daniel (in Europe at this stage) that they would soon need at least 500 new recruits.²⁷³

Officers of the Meuron Regiment were displeased with the fact that the regiment was the hereditary property of its Colonel, Charles-Daniel de Meuron. This limited their promotion prospects and some of the ambitious officers aspiring to command complained to the VOC about the nepotism in the Regiment. De Meuron saw it as an attempt to take over command of the regiment and had one of his officers, Lieutenant-Colonel Francois de Sandol-Roy, arrested in April 1785. Tension between him and his officers remained high, regimental duties were not always fulfilled and he complained that he cannot trust his officers after “the mutiny of Simon de Sandol-Roy, Bonstetten and La Tourette...”.²⁷⁴ In the end the disgruntled officers either went into VOC service or resigned their commissions and by the time the regiment was transferred to Ceylon, eight of its officers had left (including both the De Sandol-Roy’s).

The relationship between Van de Graaff and De Meuron seemed to have been tense from the start and later developed into open animosity. Van de Graaff wrote to the Stadtholder

²⁷² C171, Resolutiën, 14/3/1786, pp.10-30, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁷³ A. Linder, *Swiss Regiment Meuron*, p.43.

²⁷⁴ A. Linder, *Swiss Regiment Meuron*, pp.34-6.

in April 1785 that Meuron and his officers were botching up,²⁷⁵ while De Meuron complained in a report to the VOC about Van de Graaff and that they did not receive their pay as stipulated in the contract. In response Van de Graaff despatched a long report to the Netherlands in 1790 in which he tried to set aside De Meuron's allegations. He also added complaints by other members of the Council of Policy and by Captain De Sandol-Roy against De Meuron.²⁷⁶

Due to the discontent in the regiment and his unsettled claims against the VOC, De Meuron thought he had to go to Europe to defend his reputation. He departed from the Cape on 9 March 1786 and appointed Lieutenant-Colonel Chevalier De Meuron-Bulot as temporary commander of the regiment, who maintained it in good discipline until De Meuron's brother, Pierre-Frédéric, took over command in October 1787.²⁷⁷ Though he was not well liked, under his strong leadership morale and discipline was restored. De Meuron claimed compensation of f460825 from the VOC, but he eventually had to take the f20000 they offered him. Regarding his reputation he was more successful, as the VOC proclaimed in March 1787 that the regiment was generally well managed and organised.²⁷⁸

The Meuron Regiment was to be replaced by the Württemberg Regiment and departed to Ceylon on 9 and 10 February 1788. The Meuron Regiment maintained a depot at the Cape as troops often arrived in very poor health after the long voyage and first had to recuperate. The men were kept under proper order and discipline and also received training until it was possible to despatch them to Ceylon.²⁷⁹ By November 1789 the depot of the Meuron Regiment had two officers, a doctor, eight NCO's and as much as 140 men.²⁸⁰ After the Dutch surrendered Ceylon to the British, the regiment went into British service, becoming part of the British Army in 1799.²⁸¹

5.2. The Württemberg Regiment

After the conclusion of the peace treaty in 1784 the VOC reorganised its military establishment. The Luxemburg Regiment (at Ceylon) had to return and the German Württemberg Regiment (hired from the Duke of Württemberg) was taken into service on 1 October 1786 for an amount

²⁷⁵ NAN 1.01.50 – 1189, Eenige Missiven ..., Van de Graaff – Stadhouder, 10/4/1785.

²⁷⁶ NAN 1.01.50 – 1236, Onderdanig berigt van den Gouverneur aan de Kaap, C.J. Van de Graaff, aan Stadhouder Willem V op de memorie van beklag gedaan tegens den Gouverneur voorn: door den Heere Charles Daniel Comte de Meuron, Collonel propriétaire van een regiment infanterie in dienst van de Oost Indische Compagne der Verenigde Nederlanden, 29/12/1790.

²⁷⁷ C176, Resolutiën, 11/12/1787, pp.228-265, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁷⁸ A. Linder, *Swiss Regiment Meuron*, pp.38 and 50.

²⁷⁹ C191, Resolutiën, 15/2/1791, pp.260-347, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁸⁰ C184, Resolutiën, 27/11/1789, pp.55-249, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁸¹ A. Linder, *Swiss Regiment Meuron*, p.46.

of f60000 per year. Organisationally the regiment had two *jagers* companies, four fusiliers companies and one artillery company. Every company had five officers (one Captain plus subaltern officers) and 100 men. In total the regiment had 1922 men, which included 56 officers, 2 chaplains, 12 musicians, 12 carpenters, NCO's and soldiers.²⁸² It was destined for the Cape, but was later ordered to serve, and suffered much, on the north-east coast of Java.

In a letter, dated 28 December 1786, the *Heeren XVII* notified Van de Graaff that the Württemberg Regiment would depart for the Cape by the middle of 1787, while the Meuron Regiment had to go to Trincomalee (Ceylon) to relieve the Luxemburg Regiment.²⁸³ Between December 1787 and September 1788 the Württemberg Regiment arrived at the Cape onboard the *Drie Gebroeders*, *Josephus de Tweede*, *Vrouwe Johanna* and *Fortuin*.²⁸⁴ According to their contract, the Officer Commanding of the Regiment (Colonel Baron Theobald von Hügel) would be under the command of the Governor and the Garrison Commander at the Cape.²⁸⁵

The Württemberg Regiment had quality officers, NCO's and men. It was apparently quite an honour to be commissioned as an officer in the regiment as many of the officers were selected and educated in the Ducal Military Academy of Württemberg or the Hohe Karlsschule. One of the few people Van de Graaff seemed to have been impressed with, is the Commanding Officer of the Württemberg Regiment, Von Hügel. He also referred to him and his officers as "den braven en kundigen Commandant ... en zijn gedistingueerd corps officieren"²⁸⁶

On 31 July 1789 the regiment participated in a large parade, marching past in revue order and demonstrated their firing drills. The Military Commission also inspected the Württemberg Regiment and was very impressed by it.²⁸⁷ There was much praise all round for the Württemberg Regiment and Van de Graaff was impressed with the "seer kundige en geexperimenteerde krijgslieden, aan hun hoofd hebbende den braven colonel Von Hugell...".²⁸⁸ The regiment was regarded as a model regiment and had to be an example of what the military improvements of the VOC could achieve.

²⁸² F.S. Gaastra, "Sware continuerende Lasten" in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.100; and D. De long, *Het Krijgswezen onder de Oostindische Compagnie*, p.176. According to De long the Regiment had about a 100 men less. See also C181, Resolutiën, 13/1/1789, pp.2-88, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).
²⁸³ CA C564, Inkomende Brieven, *Heeren XVII* – Van de Graaff, 28/12/1786, pp.186-7.
²⁸⁴ C176, Resolutiën, 11/12/1787, pp.228-265, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).
²⁸⁵ J. Prinz, *Das Württembergische Kapregiment*, p.88; and C.J. Barnard, Robert Jacob Gordon se Loopbaan aan die Kaap, p.394.
²⁸⁶ NAN 1.01.50 – 1189, Eenige Missiven ..., Van de Graaff – Stadhouder, 28/1/1791.
²⁸⁷ J. Prinz, *Das Württembergische Kapregiment*, pp.21 and 94.
²⁸⁸ H.C.V. Leibbrandt and J.E. Heeres, *Memorien van den Gouverneur Van de Graaff*, pp.19 and 25.

After they arrived at the Cape the regiment requested proper workshops for maintaining and repairing their weapons and equipment, which was a daily priority of the regiment. As there was a scarcity of buildings at the Cape, they had to share the armaments workshops of the VOC.²⁸⁹ When the Luxemburg Regiment stopped at the Cape on their return journey to Europe early in 1789; some of their soldiers joined the Württemberg Regiment.²⁹⁰ Typical to military service in the period, the regiment also had its problems. A number of soldiers mutinied against their officers and demanded that their wages be paid directly to the soldiers and not to the officers. Two of the ringleaders were court-martialed and condemned to death, but before sentence was carried out, they were pardoned by their Colonel.²⁹¹

At the end of 1789 Van de Graaff deployed the whole Württemberg Regiment at Muizenberg. It was not necessary to have such a great force there, but their contract stipulated that they were not to be split. The regiment was housed in the big stable and assisted with erecting defences.²⁹²

Because of their shortage of soldiers, the High Council of the Indies ordered Van de Graaff to send the Württemberg Regiment to Batavia. He complained to the Stadtholder in January 1791 about the order, stating it would have a detrimental military effect on the Cape as the Garrison was wholly inadequate to defend it against a maritime enemy. In addition it would harm the economy of the Cape as the market would become much smaller and he warned that it will also have a negative effect on political stability at the Cape. Van de Graaff sarcastically remarked, if the regiment depart, it will be the same “als om op het Kerkhof garnisoen te gaan houden”.²⁹³

On October 1790 the *Heeren XVII* also ordered the Württemberg Regiment to Batavia and by the middle of 1791 they had left in the VOC ships the *Blitterswijk*, *De Zwaan*, *Sparenwijk*, *Candia* and *Rusthof*.²⁹⁴ Van de Graaff aptly stated that sending the Württemberg Regiment to Batavia was its death knoll, like sending it to “het koningryk der mollen ... daar ter aarde te doen bestellen”.²⁹⁵ He also told the *Heeren XVII* that the defences of the Cape were inadequate and it will cost them the Cape: “de krygsmagt aldaar destyds tegen eene behoorlyken en wel ingerigte

²⁸⁹ C177, Resolutiën, 22/2/1788, pp.213-248; and C179, Resolutiën, 24/7/1788, pp.119-147, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁹⁰ C176, Resolutiën, 19/12/1787, pp.266-308, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁹¹ S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, Vaillant – Van der Hoop, 28/7/1789, p.183.

²⁹² CA C183, Resolutiën, 13/10/1789, pp.251.

²⁹³ NAN 1.01.50 – 1189, Eenige Missiven ..., Van de Graaff – Stadhouder, 28/1/1791.

²⁹⁴ NAN 1.01.50 – 1189, Eenige Missiven ..., Van de Graaff – Stadhouder, 7/2/1791.

²⁹⁵ H.C.V. Leibbrandt and J.E. Heeres, *Memorien van den Gouverneur Van de Graaff*, pp.28-9.

attaque op de Caap veel te gering ter versekering en behoud van dit zo important point geheel onvoldoende geoordeeld weird".²⁹⁶

A depot for the regiment was created at the Cape, so that its troops that were in poor health could recuperate here and a healthy recruit could arrive at his posting in the unhealthier climate in Batavia. While waiting to be shipped out, they also underwent training,²⁹⁷ and for this purpose two officers (a Captain and a Lieutenant) and eight NCO's had to stay at the Cape.²⁹⁸

6. MILITARY INVOLVEMENT OF THE DUTCH REPUBLIC

6.1. Dutch Naval Involvement

The Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-84) finally broke the power of the VOC, as De long stated, "De kracht van de VOC was ... finaal gebroken...".²⁹⁹ The opposite to the era of Tromp and De Ruyter where the VOC assisted the State with ships, now happened as it requested such assistance from the Dutch Government. When the war broke out, the VOC had insufficient troops and lacked warships and they asked the Republic to assist with a naval squadron. The Stadtholder and the States-General approved, but by the time the squadron under the command of J.P. van Braam departed in March 1783, there were strong rumours of peace. Van Braam was ordered to use his ships in the service of the Governor-General in Batavia, as the VOC also had powerful local enemies and required naval support to maintain its status.³⁰⁰

When Van Braam arrived in Batavia in March 1784 the original plan of re-conquering VOC possessions lost to the British, was thwarted by the impending peace. A new role had to be found. Initially there was some tension regarding who the highest controlling authority was, as the Governor-General claimed he had the right to direct the squadron, while Van Braam maintained he received his orders from the States-General. Nonetheless, the arrival of Van Braam's squadron changed the character of the VOC as it now essentially was a maritime extension of the Dutch Republic, while the financial problems it faced and its military weakness emphasised its link and dependency on the Republic.³⁰¹ This process happened much later in the case of the VOC, probably because of the Dutch neutrality during the Seven Years War,

²⁹⁶ H.C.V. Leibbrandt and J.E. Heeres, *Memorien van den Gouverneur Van de Graaff*, p.25.

²⁹⁷ J. Prinz, *Das Württembergische Kapregiment*, p.183.

²⁹⁸ C191, Resolutiën, 15/2/1791, pp.260-347, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁹⁹ D. De long, *Het Krijgswezen onder de Oostindische Compagnie*, p.174.

³⁰⁰ J.C. de Jonge, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Zeewezen*, IV, pp.687-9.

while the link both the French and the British companies had with their governments was already much closer at this stage.

Van Braam's squadron soon became involved in VOC trade politics and provided military support for a number of VOC expeditions around Malaysia, such as ending the siege of Malacca and the conquest of Riouw. After a few "luisterijke overwinningen" his squadron returned via Cape Town and arrived back in Texel in June 1786. All his ships, except the frigate *Juno* that stranded off the island Wight on the return journey, made it back to the Netherlands. Van Braam's letters, journals and his analysis of the military situation at the Cape, does his reputation much credit. He was evidently a well educated and capable officer, with a clear grasp of the military and strategic situation of the Cape. He also argued against the VOC style government; emphasising that the lack of free trade had a negative effect.³⁰² After his return to the Netherlands, Van Braam was promoted to Rear Admiral in 1788 and also became a Director of the VOC.

The second Dutch squadron, under the command of Captain W. Sylvester, departed before Van Braam's return in December 1785. The squadron consisted of two ships of the line, the flagship *Holland* (68) and the *Beschermer* (54), as well as three frigates the *Amphitrite* (36), the *Ceres* (36) and the *Scipio* (20).³⁰³ Two of the Captains, S.H. Frykenius (of the *Beschermer*) and E. Lucas (of the *Scipio*), were destined to return to the Cape. The *Amphitrite* leaked badly and had to turn around for repairs. In May 1786 when the repaired *Amphitrite* sailed a further three ships went out to join Sylvester's squadron, namely, the frigate *Hoorn* (26), the sloop *Lynx* (16) and the brig *Pijl* (12).³⁰⁴ This squadron was weaker than the first, but their task was not different. As they had to protect Dutch possessions and Dutch trade, they were soon engaged in a number of campaigns in the Indies. Captain Sylvester died in Malacca and was replaced by Captain Wierts. The squadron then escorted the VOC return fleet to the Netherlands in 1788-89,³⁰⁵ but two of its ships did not return: the *Holland* was wrecked at the Cape, while the *Hoorn* was condemned in Batavia.

When the *Holland* stranded on the rocks between Slanghoek and Olifantsbos on the south-western coast of the Cape Peninsula in May 1786, 442 crewmembers (all except eight)

³⁰¹ G.J.A. Raven and N.A.M. Rodger, *Navies and Armies*, p.53; and G. Teitler, 'De Marine en de Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, pp.71-3.

³⁰² See the copies of the J.P. Van Braam letters, journal and memorandum on the defence of the Cape in CA VC119, VC120 and VC121.

³⁰³ J.C. de Jonge, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Zeewezen*, IV, pp.692-727.

³⁰⁴ J.R. Bruijn et al, *Dutch-Asiatic shipping*, I, pp.247-8; and J.C. Mollema, *Geschiedenis van Nederland ter Zee*, Volume III, p.319.

were rescued.³⁰⁶ To lose a ship of the line was a heavy loss to the Dutch naval establishment at the time and a very expensive platform to replace. Despite the fact that it was very difficult to salvage and move equipment due to the location of the wreck, most of the guns (24-, 18- and 8-pounders), a large number of gun carriages, ammunition, muskets, pistols, bayonets and sabres were salvaged from the wreck.³⁰⁷ The guns were generally in a good condition and though the gun carriages were designed for naval use, most were used ashore. Some of the guns were mounted on the fortifications at Simon's Bay and in Hout Bay, while Van de Graaff ordered Brandt to send the 18-pounders (20 guns) to Cape Town with the *Meermin* in November 1787.³⁰⁸ As the guns were important for the defence of the Cape, Van de Graaff asked the *Heeren XVII* to reimburse the Admiralty for it, but asked them to take in consideration that there was no market for such weapons at the Cape and that the VOC had incurred much cost during the salvage operation.³⁰⁹

The Dutch State decided by the late 1780's that since its naval presence in the Indies was valuable and much was achieved with it, they would try to maintain a constant naval presence in Batavia. A squadron under the command of Captain A.H.C. Staringh with only two frigates (*Thetis* and *Bellona*) and two brigs (*Zwaluw* and *Merkuur*) arrived in Batavia late in 1789. Though the objective of this squadron was to show the flag, the ships soon participated in a number of operations. Staringh reported that he received much assistance at the Cape. Wood from Plettenberg Bay was used to repair his ship and he also received men from the VOC to supplement his crew.³¹⁰ By June 1792 the ships, with the exception of the *Zwaluw* that was sold to be broken-up in Batavia, were back in the Netherlands.³¹¹ This was the last squadron to go to the East. Though the cost of the three squadrons (Van Braam, Sylvester and Staringh) was roughly 2,4 million Guilders,³¹² it created the perception that the State should be more involved in the East and that the fragile Dutch interests required better protection.

³⁰⁵ J.C. de Jonge, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Zeewezen*, IV, pp.741-2.

³⁰⁶ J.C. de Jonge, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Zeewezen*, IV, p.733.

³⁰⁷ C172, Resolutiën, 25/8/1786, pp.292-326, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

³⁰⁸ VC62, Uitgaande Brieven, Van de Graaff – Brandt, 25/11/1787, pp.667-8; VC34, Dagregister, 12/5/1786; C173, Resolutiën, 1/11/1786, p.66.

³⁰⁹ C173, Resolutiën, 1/11/1786, pp.43-92, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005); and CA C 1293, Memorien en Rapporten, Specificatie van Sodanige Vragten ..., 10/1/1787, pp.46-7.

³¹⁰ NAN 1.01.50 – 1200, Verbaal van den Capitein A.H.C. Staringh wegens zyn commando in de Oost Indien in de Jaaren 1789, 1790, 1791 en 1792. See also NAN 4.1.3.1.4.1200, Stukken verzameld door de Stadhouer, Kapt Staringh met 's lands oorlogschepen in Oost-Indie, 1789-92.

³¹¹ J.R. Bruijn et al, *Dutch-Asiatic shipping*, I, p.248; and J.C. de Jonge, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Zeewezen*, IV, pp.743-51.

³¹² V. Enthoven, 'Van Steunpilaar tot Blok aan het Been' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, pp.51-2.

The Dutch maintained a naval involvement in the East up to the outbreak of war with Britain in 1795, but they were independent frigates and escort vessels, not naval squadrons. The first of these were the *Oranjezaal* (24) that sailed just before Christmas in 1787 probably to escort three East Indiamen. She arrived at Colombo in June 1788, but was shortly afterwards condemned and sold to the breakers, while the *Valk* (24) arrived in Batavia late in 1788 and returned the next year.³¹³ A very well documented voyage was the journey of Captain Vaillant's Military Commission that sailed from Texel in February 1789 with two ships (the *Zephir* and the *Havik*) and arrived back in the Netherlands in June 1793, with the homeward bound VOC fleet in convoy.³¹⁴

The status of the officer was never as high in the Netherlands as in most other European countries and it even declined somewhat in the eighteenth century. In the East it was even lower and Van Braam's officers were disgusted to witness the contempt with which VOC officials treated their military colleagues. Even socially, only the senior officers were really acceptable.³¹⁵ One of the Dutch naval officers, C.A. VerHuell (who accompanied both Van Braam and Vaillant) had a poor view of the VOC's capacity to run a military system. He maintained it should be the responsibility of the Republic because the VOC focussed on trade and making money, and consequently its military organisation was subject to budgetary cuts and corruption, its soldiers did not show strong loyalty to the VOC and they might change their loyalty if there was a higher bidder for their services. VerHuell was horrified to see the reluctance amongst VOC officers to lead charges during the siege of Malacca and he was convinced that a system functioning in such a way should be terminated.³¹⁶ He argued that the defence of Dutch interest in the East had to have a maritime character that was based at four well-defended points, the Cape, Ceylon, Malacca and Batavia. Malacca was the most important due to its secure harbour, ample provisions and strategic location. His perceptions were in line with the direction the British and French had taken and if the Dutch did not do the same, they would continue to be weak. While the Dutch were busy deliberating their future strategy, the British focussed on greater militarization, Europeanization, more state control and tighter control over their territories.³¹⁷

The Dutch naval squadrons to the East and the visit of Dutch warships to the Cape did not entail constant naval protection for the Cape or VOC convoys, though a number of VOC

³¹³ J.R. Bruijn et al, *Dutch-Asiatic shipping*, I, p.248.

³¹⁴ J.R. Bruijn et al, *Dutch-Asiatic shipping*, I, p.248.

³¹⁵ C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch seaborne empire, 1600-1800*, p.81.

³¹⁶ G. Teitler, 'De Marine en de Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, pp.77-9.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

convoys did sail from the Cape under the protection of warships. VOC Captains received instructions on how to cooperate with warships and they were also ordered that in case of the outbreak of war, they were not to sail through the English Channel, but around Scotland.³¹⁸ The last Dutch warships to arrive at the Cape before the war were the frigate *Scipio* (20), under Captain C. de Jong, and the brig *Komeet* (18), with Lieutenant Claris. They departed from the Netherlands on 16 December 1791 and arrived at Table Bay on 28 March 1792. When they arrived, Captain Staringh and three warships were at the Cape.³¹⁹ Soon Europe would be engulfed in a long wearing-out struggle that would settle the issue of command of the seas for once and for all.

6.2 The Military Commission

The origins of the Military Commission could be traced back to a meeting of the *Heeren XVII* on 22 November 1785 in which they placed emphasis on the inadequacy of the defences of their possessions and the fact that the VOC lacked specialist military knowledge (“gebrek aan vereiste kundigheid”).³²⁰ An investigation by a special commission into the status of the VOC defensive system was therefore necessary and as the main threat to VOC possessions was an attack from the sea (maritime power projection), it had to be conducted by capable naval officers as well as officers from the engineering, artillery and infantry branches. It was argued that a naval officer should command the commission, because naval officers understood how attacks from the sea took place, while if it was under naval command, it would be easier to maintain independence from the colonial authority. The engineers would evaluate the fortifications, the artillery officers the existing artillery and the infantry officers the military organisation. They then had to suggest improvements. Van der Hoop of the Amsterdam Admiralty suggested to the Stadtholder that the expedition should have two frigates and indicated that his protégés, J.O. Vaillant and C.A. VerHuell, were the ideal candidates.³²¹ The States General approved the project in December 1786 and orders to equip the frigates *Zephir* (36) and *Havik* (20) followed in March 1787. Captain Vaillant was the designated commander of the expedition, now called the Military Commission and in command of the *Zephir*, while Captain VerHuell commanded the

³¹⁸ NAN VOC11343. Instructie voor de Opperhoofden van de Schepen der Generaale Nederlands Oost-Indische Compagnie, voor de Kamer Zeeland repatrieerde, 14/10/1786.

³¹⁹ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen, in de jaren 1791 tot 1797*, Volume I, pp.2 and 28.

³²⁰ S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, pp.141-2.

³²¹ T. Roodhuyzen, *In Woelig Vaarwater: Marineofficiëren in de Jare 1779-1802*, p.75.

Havik. However, due to the uncertain political climate and much squabbling, things were still uncertain a year later.³²²

Captain J.O. Vaillant (1751-1800) was a proficient naval commander, with a good reputation and much experience. He had served in the Mediterranean during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War and participated in a number of actions. Vaillant was deeply concerned about the state of the Dutch naval establishment and did much to improve it. He published two works, the one a seamanship guide for young officers with tactical notes, the other a study on navigation and the calculation of the longitude, in 1784 and 1786 respectively. He was also one of the most ardent advocates for coppering the hulls of all warships and was considered to be one of the most knowledgeable officers “kundigste zeeofficieren” in the Dutch naval establishment. Van der Hoop described Vaillant as an officer with true strategic insight (“een van die weinige officieren ...die in 't groot denkt en werk”).³²³ Later, in 1795, Vaillant was one of the officers that escorted the Stadtholder when he fled to Britain.³²⁴

Vaillant in the meantime studied his anticipated function. In his view, the objective of the expedition was to suggest military improvements and plan the defence of VOC possessions against both European invaders and internal threats. However, he maintained that due to financial limitations the defence requirements of the various posts had to be measured against its strategic value. A problem with the VOC management was their lack of military knowledge which often resulted in poor military decisions. This was typical of trading companies, they reluctantly addressed defence needs and did not realise that in peace you had to prepare for war: “De geest die zo eigen is aan een maatschappij van koophandel, maakt dat er een onverschilligheid gebooren word voor alle militaire kennissen en daardoor word het (zig in vrede tot oorlog te bereiden) geheel uyt het oog verloren”. Their possessions were therefore open to attack, military requirements were utterly neglected and the military had little status: “een weerloze omstandigheid zijn ... de militaire staat en veragt is en mishandeld wordt”.³²⁵ Vaillant believed that the defence of the VOC Empire had to receive a higher priority, while the status of its military establishment had to improve.

Van Braam provided invaluable advice for organising the expedition and stated that it would take at least seven years to get the VOC defences up to the required level. Therefore the Military Commission had to be given authority to investigate and should not be hindered or

³²² N. Habermehl, *Joan Cornelis van der Hoop (1742-1825). Marinebestuurder voor Stadhouder Willem V en Koning Willem I*, p.140; and S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, pp.142-6 and 148.

³²³ N. Habermehl, *Joan Cornelis van der Hoop*, pp.139-40.

³²⁴ J.C. de Jonge, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Zeewezen*, V, pp.9, 42-3 and 164.

³²⁵ S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, pp.146-7.

sneered at. Due to the insistence of the senior advocate of the VOC, S.C. Nederburgh and J.P. van Braam the expedition received its final go-ahead in October 1788. Finding capable army officers was a problem as many were not interested in such a long and potentially dangerous voyage. Eventually the following officers joined: two engineers, G.E. Schenk (an ambitious young officer) and D. van Lier (from an influential family, apparently wishing to make a fresh start); a capable infantry officer, J.F.L. Graevestein; and two Prussian officers, Stephany and Heidenreich. Willem V approved the expedition, the ships were equipped, and it eventually departed on 27 February 1789.³²⁶

The *Zephir* and *Havik* arrived at the Cape on 4 June 1789 with a letter from the VOC (dated 5 February 1789) informing the Cape about the Military Commission. Though the VOC granted permission to the Cape to carry out the changes the Military Commission suggested, they stated that it should not be more than the amount utilised for fortifications between 1771 and 1780.³²⁷ This was actually meaningless, as the expenses on fortifications were less than f50000 for the whole period – by comparison Van de Graaff had spent f209089 on fortifications just in 1787-88 alone!

The Military Commission immediately began working. Vaillant's first impression was that the Cape was well defended against a direct attack, yet, much still had to be done, as many of the defences were not secure enough. Because the Cape could not be defended by troops alone, naval officers should have advised them on where to locate fortifications. The result of this omission, according to Vaillant, was that expensive batteries were placed at locations of less importance.³²⁸

The Military Commission attended a gunnery exercise at the *Amsterdam Battery*, which Vaillant thought went very well. Fire from the 18-pounder guns in the casemates was directed at an old wreck, lying four cables distant (about 900m). Even though the wreck was stripped and only four metres was above the waterline, thirteen of the twenty rounds fired hit the wreck (some ricocheting). Then red-hot-shot, heated in an oven on a steel grid, was fired from the 12-pounders. Vaillant explained the process: the powder bag (cardoos) went in, then a wooden plug, with a piece of sheepskin against the powder and a metal plate on the other side followed, the round was then loaded with a spoon-like tool on a cylindrical wooden plug with metal on both sides and springs on the one side. Though only two of these shots hit the wreck, it immediately caused a fire. Vaillant did not have too high a regard for the high *Amsterdam Battery* ("met

³²⁶ N. Habermehl, *Joan Cornelis van der Hoop*, pp.141-2.

³²⁷ C182, Resolutiën, 4/6/1789, pp.252-57, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

³²⁸ S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, Vaillant – Van der Hoop, 1/7/1789, pp.175-6.

canon kelders onder, kwaame veele slegt voor”), but red-hot-shot was very important for shooting at ships, and the batteries had to become proficient with it. He attributed its use to Gilquin, whose artillery corps was excellent.³²⁹

Vaillant remarked that one must not make too much of the value of the Cape as it was expensive to maintain and if successive squadrons visited the Cape, it will cause shortages in provisions. He agreed with Van de Graaff’s view that 5000 to 6000 men were necessary to defend it. In terms of the military establishment, he reported that the soldiers found it difficult to survive on the small salaries they received. However, he quickly picked up that the interaction between the various military units were not so good at the Cape: “er is hier veel jalousie onder de differente Corps”.³³⁰ He regarded Gordon as a proficient and trustworthy officer with “...militaire qualiteiten en stricte eerlijkheid”, but complained that the rift between the Governor and Gordon hampered their work.³³¹ Van de Graaff, always quick to capitalise on anything that might be in his favour, later reported that the Military Commission was impressed with his work and considered his schemes for the defence of the Cape as generally good.³³²

Vaillant was impressed with the professional knowledge of Graevestein and Schenk, but his initial enthusiasm about Van Lier did not last. He complained that as Van Lier did not do his share and the two Prussian officers had insufficient command of the Dutch language; he, VerHuell and Graevestein did most of the work.³³³ Vaillant found Van Lier’s conduct unbecoming and it developed into a problem: “Zijn gedrag was alleronbetaamelijkst. Hij was meer druncken en was een regte leelikert”.³³⁴ Van Lier eventually died in Colombo – his lifestyle caught up with him and after his death Vaillant only wryly remarked: “na als een zwijn geleeft te hebben”.³³⁵

Vaillant’s concern with members of his team not contributing was understandable as the report of the Military Commission on the Cape alone is considerable (770 handwritten pages in total). It contains much detail and many suggestions on the military organisation of the Cape, command, control and communication functions, fortifications, compensation, equipment,

³²⁹ S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, Vaillant – Van der Hoop, 1/7/1789, pp.176-81.

³³⁰ S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, Vaillant – Van der Hoop, 28/7/1789, p.183.

³³¹ S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, Vaillant – Van der Hoop, 1/7/1789, p.175.

³³² H.C.V. Leibbrandt and J.E. Heeres, *Memorien van den Gouverneur Van de Graaff*, pp.21-3.

³³³ N. Habermehl, *Joan Cornelis van der Hoop*, p.143.

³³⁴ S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, Vaillant – Van der Hoop, 15/9/1790, p.203.

³³⁵ S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, Vaillant – Van der Hoop, 4/12/1790, p.204.

manpower, medical care and much more.³³⁶ But how did the Military Commission see the defence of the Cape and what improvements did it suggest?

In the whole Vaillant thought Cape Town well defended and suggested that it would be difficult to launch a direct assault on the town. Such an attack would need warships, transport ships and many regular troops as amphibious landings at the Cape would take place under difficult conditions with much resistance.³³⁷ Van de Graaff informed the Commission that an attacker would require 8000 to 10000 men, with a fleet of up to 35 warships and 23 transport ships. To project so much power from Europe to the Cape would be difficult if not impossible, Vaillant thought, while the possibility existed that such an armada could be intercepted and defeated in detail if they were not kept together. Due to this and the typical logistic and military problems large forces faced, Vaillant did not anticipate that such a large expedition would attack the Cape.³³⁸

The Military Commission stated that much had to be done to place the defence of the Cape on a proper footing. As it was not possible to do it all at once, the artillery had to be improved, more engineers were necessary and as expensive work must be undertaken, it should be done in phases. The first phase had to be Cape Town. The completion of the crucial *Coehoorn Battery* and the ravelins linking it with the Castle was regarded as the most important. Then followed the improvements to the *Mouille Battery*, as this battery provided important defence against ships entering the bay (ships were often becalmed right opposite it). The next objective was to improve the ravelins in front of the *Oranje* and *Nassau* bastions of the Castle, complete the so-called *Gordon Battery* and create a small battery on the slope of Devil's Peak.³³⁹ The second phase was the completion of the two batteries in Hout Bay. The battery erected during the war (the *West Battery*) had to be moved forward for greater impact, while the *East Battery* was well located as it was high and posed a threat to ships because it was very difficult for ships to shoot at it. The third phase should be the creation of two permanent batteries for Simon's Bay as well as the improvements to the *Couvre face Imhoff*, the Sea Lines and the ravelin in front of the Castle's entrance.³⁴⁰

In addition and contrary to Van de Graaff's opinion, the Commission thought that the *Nieuwe* and *Intermediaire Batteries* were important for the defence of the town and had to be

³³⁶ CA VC64, Memorie aan zyne Hoogheid van de Militaire Commissie, 25 September 1789 en Briewen en Rapporten van de Militaire Commissie, 1790.

³³⁷ CA VC64, Memorie aan Zijne Hoogheid van de Militaire Commissie, 25/9/1789, p.9.

³³⁸ CA VC64, Memorie aan Zijne Hoogheid van de Militaire ..., pp.9-13.

³³⁹ CA VC64, Memorie aan Zijne Hoogheid van de Militaire ..., Bylagen, Litt A, pp.161-5.

³⁴⁰ CA VC64, Memorie aan Zijne Hoogheid van de Militaire ..., Bylagen, Litt A, pp.167-71.

maintained. They were impressed with the use of red-hot-shot and stated, as the Cape had to be prepared to resist a bombardment by warships, more ovens must be created.³⁴¹ The Commission also suggested that the road coming into the town from the west should either be closed or better defended with retrenchments. Kloofnek had to be better protected with two redans or redoubts, the fortification at Kamptz Bay had to be maintained to cover the beach and the French redoubt on Constantia Neck had to be improved. They did not consider Muizenberg as so important and doubted if a force would land there and march all the way to the Cape, but warned that its traverses nonetheless had to be maintained and manned.³⁴²

In terms of the Garrison the Commission suggested that the *Nationaal Battaillon* should consist of 604 men organised into five companies, with 23 officers and 10 cadets (two per company),³⁴³ while the Artillery Corps should have about 400 men altogether, with 21 officers and eight cadets, organised into three companies.³⁴⁴ Van de Graaff suggested to the Military Commission that the artillery component should be 700 to 750 strong, but the Commission answered that in their calculations the Württemberg Regiment was part of the defence of the Cape and its artillery component added six officers and 170 artillerists to the number.³⁴⁵

The mobility horses and cavalry provided, was very important in a large and thinly populated area such as the Cape. The Military Commission therefore suggested that a standing dragoon force of 200 men must be created. The dragoons had to be well armed (swords, pistols and carbines) and could act as a skirmishing force in the event of an amphibious landing, disrupt enemy communications and guard distant landing places. The advantage was that such a force could perform cavalry roles and be deployed as infantry if necessary.³⁴⁶ Van de Graaff always knew better: he did not doubt the value of horses in the vast countryside, but suggested that since such a force would be expensive, one should rather supplement the garrison with 444 men in lieu of dragoons.³⁴⁷

Vaillant was critical of the VOC, stating that if the Cape was important to it more care must be taken to secure it. By September 1789 he had completed his report and handed a copy to the Governor. He awaited feedback, but received nothing, and wrote to Van der Hoop that

³⁴¹ CA VC64, Memorie aan Zijne Hoogheid van de Militaire ..., Bylagen, Litt A, pp.174-5.

³⁴² CA VC64, Memorie aan Zijne Hoogheid van de Militaire ..., Bylagen, Litt A, pp.171-4.

³⁴³ CA VC64, Memorie aan Zijne Hoogheid van de Militaire ..., Bylagen, Litt C, pp.275-86.

³⁴⁴ CA VC64, Memorie aan Zijne Hoogheid van de Militaire ..., Bylagen, Litt D, pp.287-92.

³⁴⁵ CA VC64, Memorie aan Zijne Hoogheid van de Militaire ..., Bylagen, Litt D2, Extract memorie van den Heer Gouverneur, 16/9/1789 and Vaillant – Van de Graaff, 29/9/1787, pp.293-5.

³⁴⁶ CA VC64, Memorie aan Zijne Hoogheid van de Militaire ..., Bylagen, Litt F, pp.313-20.

³⁴⁷ CA VC64, Brieven en Rapporten van de Militaire Commissie 1790, Van de Graaff – Vaillant, 10/9/1789, pp.585-97.

the Governor would probably carry-on as he thought best.³⁴⁸ Van de Graaff, quick to assume credit, told the Council of Policy in November that the Military Commission approved his work and saw his improvements on the fortifications as essential (“goedgekeurd, maar zelfs noodzaakelijk”) and as a result, the Cape required more engineers and a better defence infrastructure.³⁴⁹

The *Zephir* and *Havik* sailed from False Bay on 7 October 1789, to inspect the VOC possessions in the East. They were back at the Cape on 22 August 1792. The climate of Batavia had a destructive effect on Vaillant’s ships and personnel, he had many ill sailors onboard, while his ships required many repairs. In total they had lost a third of their crewmembers and many had to be hospitalised at the Cape. It is interesting to note that Vaillant initially held the opinion that the Cape was too expensive to maintain, stating if all ships were coppered and well provisioned, they might do without the Cape. Now, on his return voyage, the Cape with its repair facilities, hospital, refreshments and the crew reinforcement, became indispensable to his expedition.³⁵⁰ Vaillant was very disappointed at the defensive situation when he returned to the Cape. Nothing they suggested was done and the fortifications were dilapidated: “alles is vervallen”. If the VOC did nothing to fundamentally improve the fixed defences, the only way out would be to defend the Cape with a naval force.³⁵¹ But that was a vague possibility. With war clouds looming and a great war just over the horizon, the warships *Zephir* and *Havik* had to escort the VOC return fleet consisting of ten ships back to Europe. They sailed on 5 February 1793.³⁵² In the end the Military Commission had very little practical consequences for the Cape.

The Military Commission was successful as it explicitly pointed out the shortcomings in the VOC defensive system. However, the situation in Europe was changing drastically and the defence of the dominions became less important. In the opinion of a few informed persons, the work of the Military Commission was doomed from the start. Van der Hoop wrote to Vaillant in October 1789 that though his work was essential, he doubted if it will have the desired effect as the necessary means and will to execute its suggestions might not exist.³⁵³ Despite Vaillant’s valuable work, it was unfortunately too late for the VOC to repel the British onslaught on the

³⁴⁸ S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, Vaillant – Van der Hoop, 5/9/1789, pp.184-5.

³⁴⁹ C184, Resolutiën, 27/11/1789, pp.55-249, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

³⁵⁰ S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, Vaillant – Van der Hoop, 7/11/1792, p.219.

³⁵¹ S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, Vaillant – Van der Hoop, 7/11/1792, p.226.

³⁵² C211, Resolutiën, 14/1/1793, pp.220-256, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

³⁵³ S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, Van der Hoop – Vaillant, 19/10/1789, p.191.

Cape of Good Hope, Ceylon and Malacca.³⁵⁴ The reports and recommendations, done with so much zeal, through much effort and at a high cost (both financially and in human lives) could simply be filed!

7. CONCLUSION

The end of the Van de Graaff-era was also the end of a cycle for the defence of the Cape. Before the war its defence was in a “deplorable condition”, the Dutch managed to hang onto the Cape with French assistance, while as peace returned they focused on improving it by expanding the fortifications and stationing foreign regiments at the Cape, despite the poor finances of the VOC. Van de Graaff worked uneconomically and squandered much money, which became unacceptable as the VOC steadily drifted into bankruptcy. The result was that all work stopped and the foreign regiment was sent away. Once again the defence of the Cape became poor, while a great war was imminent.

It is easy to see Van de Graaff as a Don Quixote-like character, yet in some ways he was capable as much of his work and his earlier career suggested that he was a competent military engineer. Though he understood the military environment, he possessed little of the leadership and command skills great military men had. Van de Graaff was pre-occupied with his particular job, the improvement of the fortifications, but was unaccustomed to diplomacy and the political organisation he had to manage, while he was seemingly insensitive to the population of the colony he had to run. Though he did well as a military engineer and understood his speciality well, as a soldier and in soldierly terms he failed. He created a clumsy military organisation, showed clear signs of nepotism and favouritism, and worst of all, he negated military discipline and the proper functioning of the military organisation through the way he controlled it. He had an extremely poor relationship with Gordon, one of the reasons for it was that he bypassed Gordon and gave orders to his subordinates without always keeping him as the Commanding Officer in the picture – in military terms this is anathema. As the highest political authority he should have provided policy guidelines to the military, but instead he tried to command the military. This did not work. Furthermore, a proper chain of command is very important to the military, an aspect Van de Graaff negated by working with his favourites. He therefore did the military establishment much damage.

³⁵⁴

F.S. Gaastra, “Sware continuerende Lasten” in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.101.

At the Cape Van de Graaff enjoyed being a figure of authority. He set up “court” with many horses, vehicles and servants, while he neglected his administrative responsibilities and quarrelled with his officials. No doubt, he should not have had the responsibilities of government weighed upon him. There is nothing to suggest that he had the experience or that his earlier career gave him the administrative, political and managerial capabilities necessary for such a demanding post in such a crucial juncture, not only in Dutch history, but specifically in the history of the Cape.

On the positive side, not only was the fortifications improved during the Van de Graaff-era, but impressive maps and charts were created and much analytical thought went into the defence of the Cape. Gordon’s analytical faculties, evident in his work in the natural sciences, characterised his approach to the analysis of the defence of the Cape. He was acquainted with the international political situation and military literature of his time and understood what could be done within the specific parameters of time and place for the defence of the Cape. His suggestions were not unlike those of the Military Commission, yet both amounted to nothing.

Dutch warships became frequent visitors to the Cape, but their main task was to support the VOC in the East and to protect Dutch trade, not the maritime defence of the Cape. However, the Cape proved that it was possible to provide warships with the necessary support and that it could act as a naval base. The maritime empires of the day and specifically the most powerful adversaries of the Dutch (Britain and France), carefully noted this fact and it would be an important consideration during a future war.

The understanding that the Dutch State should be more involved in the East as Dutch interests were very fragile and required better protection, was important, and was in line with the direction the British and the French had taken much earlier. British control over her dominions became tighter, a greater military effort went into it and greater Europeanization took place. If the Dutch did not do the same, they would continue to be weak. As Vaillant poignantly remarked, the VOC was a trading company, lacked military knowledge and understanding and did not realise that in peace you had to prepare for war. Their possessions were open to attack and military requirements were utterly neglected. Nothing came of the suggestions by the Military Commission and in this sense the co-operation between the VOC and the Dutch State was not successful.

In defence terms the Cape went through a cycle: immediately after the war much attention was paid to defence as the VOC appointed a Governor with military experience, improved the fortifications, maintained a large garrison and requested military assistance from the State. Soon however, the burden of it all became too heavy and expenses were severely

curtailed, which again impacted negatively on the military establishment. In the meantime one of the most momentous events in the history of the Western World, the French Revolution and its associated wars, was starting to unfold in Europe. The Dutch Republic and the VOC did not have the capacity to shoulder yet another war against powerful European adversaries. As the ensuing discussion will show, due to its inadequate defences, the Cape was wholly unprepared!

PART IV
THE IMPACT OF THE WARS OF THE FRENCH
REVOLUTION AND THE CONQUEST OF THE CAPE,
1792-1795

Chapter 7

OUTBREAK OF THE WARS OF FRENCH REVOLUTIONARY AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE, 1792-1795

1. INTRODUCTION

The French Revolution and the subsequent wars had an important impact on world history. Revolutionary France declared war against the United Provinces and Britain and for nearly two years the Dutch fought against France. The successful French attack on the Netherlands in 1794-95 did not only impact on Dutch history, but also had a vast influence on the history of the Cape and South Africa.

The latter part of the eighteenth century saw the enormous extension of British influence, which was probably the external counterpart of the beginning of the industrial revolution, while it was also part of the expansion process that began centuries earlier. The growth in British trade was staggering, trade missions were established, commercial treaties negotiated with greater and lesser states, the intervention in India grew, a penal settlement was established in Sydney and the British even seriously considered creating a base in South Africa. The British Government was therefore willing to take an active role in expansionism, which was either due to a desire to protect commerce or out of a strategic calculation – if it is possible to separate the two.¹ The scope of the British world-wide involvement and its purposeful expansionism were astounding, but then, mercantilist attitudes to the objectives of war, "... had always dominated the policies of Britain's ruling oligarchy".²

As British interest in the East grew, so did the strategic posture of the Cape, with the result that both Dutch and British observers of the time described it as a literal "key" to the East. Britain learned the lessons of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War well and would not allow the French to control the Cape again in a war. As the Cape was located halfway to the East, it could only be reached by sea. Therefore those wielding sea power became hearty contenders for the Cape and control of the sea route around the southernmost tip of Africa.

¹ P.M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, p.119.

² G. Lefebvre, *Napoleon 1799-1807*, p.113.

The VOC was virtually bankrupt and received little support from the Dutch State. After the wasteful Van de Graaff era, the Cape administration was severely curtailed, while it experienced economic hardship and much unhappiness existed with the government of the day. Two special Commissioners-General were despatched to place the VOC Empire on an improved footing, but they were unable to salvage the situation. After the outbreak of the war the military situation was somewhat improved and much was actually done, considering the limited resources available. However, as Britain was organising an attempt on the Cape one of the most important determinants in the history of South Africa, British influence, was about to come into play.

The aim of this chapter is to shed light on some of the conditions that led to the British decision to capture the Cape and to describe the situation at the Cape. The chapter therefore commences with a brief overview of the international situation, while the strategic value of the Cape is discussed with specific reference to the British objectives and their decision to despatch an expedition to the Cape. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the conditions at the Cape and the military preparations to improve its defence after the outbreak of war.

2. THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION: BRITAIN, THE UNITED PROVINCES, THE VOC AND THE WAR OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

The good French-Dutch relationship came to an end after the *Patriotten* affair of 1787 and the subsequent alliance the United Provinces concluded with Britain and Prussia. During the French Revolution the United Provinces was seen as an enemy of the Revolution due to their support to emigrating French nobles.³ As the tension between the states increased due to the French Revolution, the Stadtholder directed policy in accordance with a defensive alliance with Britain. It was evident that a continental power like the United Provinces would not be able to be neutral in a future war and that her fortune would be determined by a continental war: if France was successful, it would influence the Dutch political direction significantly. However, with vast colonies in the East and West Indies, it seemed that the Dutch had more to fear from the British than the French, specifically as the fledgling new revolutionary French government was soon involved in a war with the most powerful European states.⁴

³ B. Slot, *Vriendschap en Wantrouwen: Twee eeuwen Frans-Nederlandse diplomatieke betrekkingen 1588-1795*, pp.46-7.

⁴ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812*, Volume I, p.83.

The Wars of the French Revolution and indeed the whole series of wars collectively referred to as the Napoleonic Wars, commenced as early as 20 April 1792 when the French Assembly declared war on Austria. On 1 February 1793, while already at war with Austria, Prussia and Sardinia, France declared war against the “two tyrants”, the King of England and the Stadtholder of the United Provinces.⁵ On 20 February 1793 the French Convention called up 300 000 conscripts and on 23 August the French Executive Body, the Committee of Public Safety, thought the “fatherland in danger” and decreed the *levée en masse*, which amounted to the conscription of all the national resources; human and material. It worked and was a real transformation process; the Army grew while a war economy directed the production of armaments, equipment and supplies. By the spring of 1794 more than 750 000 trained, equipped and highly motivated men were available. As Clausewitz stated, it was the result of the “participation of the people in this great affair of state”.⁶ It was a terrible portent that a new age in the history of warfare had dawned. The eighteenth century, an age of limited war with small professional armies, was no more. Due to the influence of the French Revolution and a military colossus like Napoleon Bonaparte, war became a sweeping affair that would not only engulf the whole of Europe, but influenced world history.

From a geopolitical perspective the British position was clear; trade had to be protected, while the empire in the East became evermore important. Already in 1790 British statesmen emphasised that the “great objective [was] to preserve the empire ... in comparison of which even trade is a subordinate or collateral consideration”.⁷ Empire had to be maintained for prestige and to pre-empt a competitor, as a result its effective defence required strategic thought. Not only one location, but the whole network, region or route required protection. Strategic security was therefore a vital concern, specifically as France and Britain was locked in an historic and total struggle. Britain therefore viewed the unfolding events with apprehension and became more concerned about its “defensive strategic survival”, than with expansionism.⁸ The security of the empire was crucial and due to its location control of the Cape was important for defence – it was not itself a profitable colony.

Before the American War of Independence, the EEIC was content to have St Helena Island as a base, but due to the global nature of the war, a failed attempt on the Cape was made

⁵ G.A. Geerts, *Samenwerking en Confrontatie. De Frans-Nederlandse militaire betrekkingen voornamelijk in de Franse tijd*, p.37.

⁶ G.E. Rothenberg, *The Napoleonic Wars*, pp.10 and 26.

⁷ R. Hyam, ‘The Primacy of Geopolitics: The Dynamics of British Imperial Policy, 1763-1963’ in *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth Studies*, XXVII (1999), p.31.

⁸ *Ibid.*

in 1781. The EEIC and the British Government analysed the unsuccessful Johnstone expedition and Colonel Patrick Ross provided Dundas with a detailed account of the Johnstone expedition and the reasons for its failure. The Right Honourable Henry Dundas (afterwards Lord Melville), probably the most dominating personality in the British Government on Indian affairs for the best part of two crucial decades, was convinced that the Cape was of much value to Britain. It seems that from the moment he became involved in Indian affairs, Dundas considered the acquisition of the Cape a necessity. He even considered creating a base in South Africa. He was also well informed about its defences as well as the dependence of the French Islands and the Island of St Helena on the Cape for provisions.⁹ Dundas was an influential, hardworking and enthusiastic individual and had previously served as treasurer of the Navy (1784-1800), was Commissioner on the Indian Board of Control (1784-93), became President of the India Board in 1793 and was Home Secretary (1791-94). He served as Secretary of State from 1794 to 1801.¹⁰

Due to the aggressive approach of the French revolutionaries, Britain was concerned about the weakness of the Dutch state. As early as 1791 Dundas proposed that the VOC place all its settlements under the “benefit of British power and protection” while in exchange they would receive a monopoly of the spice trade (not important to Britain) and be allowed to participate in the Chinese trade. The British emphasised that it would be relieve the Dutch of the cost of maintaining their settlements in India and the Cape, which would strengthen their position against the French. The Dutch obviously declined it – as they did earlier with a similar offer.¹¹ By December 1792, the British Ambassador in the Netherlands warned that Britain “will not be indifferent if France shall make herself, directly or indirectly, sovereign of the Low Countries...”.¹²

British strategy in the war was directed by the Prime Minister, William Pitt, the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Chatham (Pitt’s brother) and the Secretary of State, Henry Dundas. British strategy was clear; they had to establish command at sea and thereby protect their own trade. To achieve this, they could not only rely on the navy, but Britain needed bases at important strategic choke points across the globe. From such bases, British trade could be protected and they use it for the purpose of maritime power projection. The Cape of Good Hope was crucial for the protection of British trade as well as power projection to the East and into the southern oceans.

⁹ L.C.F. Turner, *The Cape of Good Hope and the Trafalgar Campaign*, p.123.

¹⁰ W. Foster, *John Company*, pp.254-9; and M. Arkin, *John Company at the Cape. A History of the Agency under Pringle (1794-1815)*, p.190.

¹¹ S.F.N. Gie, ‘The Cape Colony under Company Rule, 1708-1795’ in E.A. Walker (ed), *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, p.171.

¹² A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire*, I, p.32.

The last few decades of the eighteenth century was a period of innovation and improvement in ship design and armament: Ships became more seaworthy than the earlier top-heavy and clumsy designs, while navies standardised ship types or classes and used improved guns. By the 1780's the hulls of most navy vessels were coppered, which kept them clear from barnacles and improved manoeuvrability and speed.

Navies were powerful military instruments, but they were expensive to acquire and maintain. A first class naval establishment required an impressive industrial and logistic capability which centred on large dockyards and shore facilities. These extensive infrastructures with their large labour forces were probably the most remarkable industrial plants of their time and signified the capacity of the European military-industrial complexes and the power of their navies in comparison with navies in other parts of the world. The extensive Dutch “s lands Zeemagzijn” in Amsterdam that burnt down in 1791, was a good example of such a vast yard and storage facility.¹³ Furthermore, as naval forces were crucial for the protection of trade and overseas empire, the maritime powers of the age required base facilities abroad and European navies charted much of the coastline of the world because it was to the benefit of trade (it made seafaring safer) and also facilitated power projection (provided information crucial for operations).

This was also a great era for the British Royal Navy. Sea-minded administrators understood the influence of sea power on British prosperity, while in the collective British mind the navy was viewed with affection. After the Sandwich-era naval administration was improved due to a great extent to the capable management of the Comptroller, Sir Charles Middleton (later Lord Barham).¹⁴ Yet, the navy was far from in a perfect condition when war broke out: administratively it had many problems, a smaller peacetime budget caused some neglect and it dropped in size. As a fighting force it had a glorious tradition and most significantly: it had a body of experienced, professional and capable officers. Its captains and admirals were not only men that fought under Keppel, Rodney and Howe, but also those who won fame as the compatriots of Nelson, Hood and Jervis. To augment its professional leadership, the navy had a large body of trained seamen and senior rates, who formed the nucleus of a rapidly increasing naval service and successfully incorporated new recruits.¹⁵

When Britain entered the war in 1793 the infrastructure of the navy and its professional knowledge were severely tested. In 1792 it had 16 000 sailors in service, while on 20 December

¹³ J. Black, *Warfare in the Eighteenth Century*, p.148.

¹⁴ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Admiralty*, p.82; and L. Gardiner, *The British Admiralty*, pp.182-3.

¹⁵ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire*, I, pp.69-70.

(six weeks before hostilities broke out) Parliament approved the number of seamen to be increased to 25 000 (less than a quarter of its strength at the end of the previous war). Within weeks the commissioned ships of the line rose from 26 to 54, while the total number of commissioned ships rose from 136 to over two hundred. The total number of ships of the line Britain had available when the war broke out was 115 and by the end of 1793, 85 were in commission. Soon the Royal Navy had close to 300 ships and about 45 000 officers and men.¹⁶ At the same time France and Spain each had more than 70 ships of the line available and the Dutch had about 50.¹⁷ However, the number of ships alone does not give the true picture. Ships were often in a poor condition, were not serviceable, or simply carried too a small, or inexperienced crew.

During the 1780's many European Navies launched substantial naval building programmes. As a result of an extensive building programme the Dutch regained some of their lost naval prestige and their navy again ranked fifth by 1785.¹⁸ The Dutch Admiralties constructed 84 warships (ships of the line and frigates) between 1777 and 1789, while only six were completed between 1790 and 1795. The number of commissioned ships declined after 1790 and with fewer ships at sea, officers waited longer for seagoing appointments, while crews were inexperienced and had little exposure to naval routine. Though the Dutch naval establishment had 49 ships of the line available in 1793, only five large ships of the line and 21 frigates were fully operational, while many of the ships were in a poor state.¹⁹ Furthermore, as the water around the Dutch coast was shallow, these ships were generally of lighter burden and many of them would not have been classified as ships of the line in the Royal Navy. Dutch frigates were generally also smaller and the Dutch Navy was not considered as a force that would have a major influence on the war.

The French Navy came out of the previous war with renewed self-confidence. New ships were added to the fleet during the 1780's and even during the French Revolution. By February 1793 it had 73 ships of the line and 64 frigates, while technically its ships were "thought to represent the optimum of firepower and seaworthiness ... equal to any ships in the world".²⁰ Yet, the administrative and political disruption the Revolution brought had a negative impact on the French Navy as its old officer corps was, in effect, shattered by 1792.

¹⁶ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire*, I, pp.74-5 and 96; as well as L. Gardiner, *The British Admiralty*, pp.182-3.

¹⁷ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire*, I, pp.74-5.

¹⁸ J. Black, *Warfare in the Eighteenth Century*, p.145.

¹⁹ N. Habermehl, *Joan Cornelis van der Hoop*, p.151.

²⁰ R. Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare*, p.261.

The British achieved some early naval successes, such as the Battle of the Glorious First of June in 1794, during which a French fleet was defeated because of poor ship handling. This added to the attrition of the French Navy and the British nearly gained a commanding naval position. However, the strategic situation suddenly changed, when Spain and the Netherlands joined the French alliance and added substantial naval resources (ships, manpower and shore-facilities) to the French side. Britain was forced to evacuate the Mediterranean and a struggle for maritime supremacy followed. With her vulnerable maritime links, so crucial to the British island economy under threat, the war indeed became a struggle for survival.

Measured against European standards the British Army was small, but sufficient to garrison her overseas possessions, while in conjunction with a strong navy it guaranteed British security. A great army could not secure trade, but British sea power gave her army mobility and multiplied its actual numbers. The Royal Navy was therefore “the foundation without which everything else was useless”.²¹

It was in India above all that the British Empire expanded and this so-called “jewel in the crown” was essential for British prosperity. As the long sea-route that channelled the wealth was vulnerable and was practically controlled from the Cape, British anxiety about the status of the Cape is understandable. By 1793 the directors of the EEIC were already convinced that the Cape had to be secured by the British Navy.²² The Cape was actually seen as a location for a permanent naval base, not just a place where warships could visit en route to the East, or where they could await convoys.

At this stage it was altogether clear that large Asian trading companies, as commercial enterprises, had no future. The EEIC gradually relinquished its commercial activities and was transformed into the colonial government. When its charter was renewed in 1794, in the words of a contemporary, the EEIC became “the Agent of the British Nation ... acting ... under the control of the Executive Power and of Parliament”.²³ The process was more difficult for the VOC due to a different political environment, the fact that it was financially ruined, had to transform and could only survive with state intervention. But, the process was interrupted by war.²⁴

Strategically Britain feared that the ports of the Low Countries (both the Austrian Netherlands and the United Provinces) might come under French sway as it could threaten

²¹ H.W. Richmond, *Imperial Defence and Capture at Sea in War*, pp.223 and 237.

²² M. Arkin, *John Company at the Cape*, p.191.

²³ John Bruce in his report on the renewal of the Company's charter in 1794, quoted in M. Arkin, *John Company at the Cape*, p.188.

²⁴ F.S. Gaastra, 'War, Competition and Collaboration ...' in H.V. Bowen, M. Lincoln and N. Rigby, *The World of the East India Company*, p.67.

British commerce and the essence of her security. Add to this the possibility of French control over the Cape and the potential threat it posed, then indeed the situation was serious from the British perspective. In November 1792 France invaded the Austrian Netherlands for the second time and the country fell within a month – yet in 1793 the Austrians managed to regain it.

Though Britain and the United Provinces were allies, the Dutch weakness, in the face of resolute French forces enthused with revolutionary fervour, caused anxiety. The day after war with France broke out, the British opened negotiations with the Dutch concerning the military reinforcement of the Cape. Lord Grenville (Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs) stated on 2 February 1793 that a French invasion of India from Mauritius and Reunion would be impossible, if their food supply from the Cape could be severed and a British garrison could be dispatched from St Helena to assist the Cape.²⁵ At the same time the French General C.F. Dumouriez (in the Austrian Netherlands) issued a proclamation asking the Dutch to depose of the tyranny of the Anglophile House of Orange, as the Stadtholder was planning to hand Dutch possessions over to the British. But despite the French threat, the Dutch remained reluctant to simply invite the British in.²⁶ At the end of March, with a French Army threatening the Netherlands, fear of the French reached a climax and a VOC deputation requested British military assistance from Lord Auckland, the British Ambassador in The Hague. Negotiations commenced and the British Cabinet undertook to provide support, as Grenville stated: “Whatever can be done for the protection of the Cape will be an object of the serious and early attention of His Majesty’s Government”.²⁷ Dundas followed affairs with interest and ensured Grenville that protecting the Cape, “is an object of so much importance, both to Holland and Great Britain, it is impossible for this country to view with indifference any circumstances that can endanger the safety of the settlement”.²⁸

The States-General appreciated the British concern and their offer to assist, as the VOC could not ensure the security (“volstreckt buiten staat”) of the Cape, but they preferred British naval assistance above troops: “een aanzienlyke Zee Magt mogelyk een prompter en geschikter middel zoude weezen om het meergemelde Etablissement teegen eenen Vyandelyken aanval te dekken”.²⁹ The problems with British troop reinforcements were that the Cape required a

²⁵ G.M Theal (ed), *Records of the Cape Colony*, Volume I, Grenville – Auckland, 2/2/1793, p.1.
²⁶ S.F.N. Gie, ‘The Cape Colony under Company Rule, 1708-1795’ in E.A. Walker (ed), *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, p.172. See also W.G. Perrin (ed), *The Keith Papers, Selected from the Letters and Papers of Admiral Lord Viscount Keith*, Volume I, p.207.
²⁷ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Grenville – Auckland, 22/3/1793, p.8.
²⁸ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Dundas – Grenville, 23/4/1793, pp.10-11.
²⁹ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Extract uit het Register der Resolutiën van de Hoog Mogende Heeren Staaten Generaal der Vereenigde Nederlande, 7/3/1793, pp.4-7.

considerable force for protection, while British troops stationed at the Cape would cause command and control problems as they had to be directly under VOC command. The British were reluctant to allow this, as they considered the position of the Stadtholder too precarious and they did not want their troops directly under VOC control. In a letter from P.J. Guepin (Chief Advocate of the VOC) to Lord Auckland he exaggerated the military strength of the Cape, reiterated the arguments against placing British troops at the Cape and stated that the Dutch preferred a fleet.³⁰ As the Allied armies achieved some success in the summer of 1793, the Dutch did not pursue the matter further and the negotiations amounted to nothing.

In June 1794 the French Army of the North under General Jean Charles Pichegru again invaded the Austrian Netherlands and in conjunction with General Jourdan a series of advances followed. On 10 July Pichegru entered Brussels and linked up with Jourdan. As the French army marched to the Dutch frontier, the British dispatched a considerable force under the command of the Duke of York to assist with the defence of the Netherlands, but the French advance forced the Dutch and British defenders back and by middle October the French had reached the Rhine (divided into the Waal and the Leck in the Netherlands).³¹ The winter of 1794-95 was unusually severe and in January 1795, the French advance into the Netherlands continued over the frozen waterways.³² The Stadtholder (Willem V, the Prince of Orange), fled to England on 18 January and on 20 January 1795 Pichegru entered Amsterdam. In the meantime, the Dutch provinces and cities declared for France, while the British troops were relentlessly pursued until they escaped into German territory from where they returned to Britain in April. The French also captured the Dutch fleet in Texel, when Pichegru, in a bold move, led a cavalry charge across the ice.³³

Before the French attack on the United Provinces, the country experienced a genuine build-up of revolutionary fervour. An attempted rising in Amsterdam was suppressed in October 1794, while in January 1795 when the French armies reached Utrecht, they were enthusiastically awaited. By the time the French took Amsterdam, the city was already under the control of revolutionary committees. In the rest of the country the French invaders seemed to have been well received, "almost like a carnival" as the invaders entered towns with tricolours flying. Many of the *Patriotten* in the Netherlands saw the French as the bringers of freedom and the States-General of February 1795 was purely a *Patriotten* body that abolished the Stadtholderate, annulled the oath of allegiance to the Prince of Orange and created the new

³⁰ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Guepin – Auckland, 23/5/1793, pp.12-16.

³¹ J.I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, p.1119.

³² A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire*, I, pp.169-70.

Batavian Republic to replace the United Provinces. In contrast with events in Paris, in the Netherlands the former Orange leaders were not harshly treated and very little violence occurred. However, Orangists in positions of authority were brusquely replaced by *Patriotten*. In May the Batavian Republic concluded an offensive and defensive alliance with France. As an ally of France the Netherlands was obviously an enemy of Britain, though war was only formally declared on 15 September 1795.³⁴

As Britain and the Netherlands were still formally allied by January 1795, many Dutch ships were in British harbours, often for protection against French warships and privateers. After the French invasion, Britain placed an embargo on all Dutch ships in British harbours and they then fell into British hands. This was the fate of many vessels from the West and East Indies that were in Plymouth.³⁵ The British strategic fear, that the Low Countries might come under the French sway, now became a reality and with it the potential threat to the British livelihood – commerce. Vigorous British efforts were immediately afoot to seize rich or vital Dutch colonies.³⁶

When war broke out the Dutch feared that the French would use their excellent local knowledge of the Cape and its defences to capture it. Ironically, due to the fluid political situation, the attacker would not be French!

3. THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF THE CAPE

British successes against the French in North America and India during the previous transoceanic conflicts illustrated the British ability to combine local and distant resources. They often relied on local sources to supply auxiliary troops, logistic and other requirements. Yet, a substantial body of troops and war equipment still had to be carried from Britain across the ocean on long, hazardous voyages to the various theatres of operations – a typical exercise in maritime power projection. Such a capability was crucial to British military success and was enhanced by the fact that they established bases in various parts of the world from where troops, munitions and other supplies could be had. This did not only boost British confidence, but also aided military planning. The strategic and operational value of base areas closer to the theatre of operations was also clearly illustrated during various British campaigns in the Caribbean and North America.

³³ J.I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, p.1122; and J. Black, *Warfare in the Eighteenth Century*, p.195.

³⁴ J.I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, pp.1119-22.

³⁵ T. Roodhuyzen, *In woelig vaarwater*, pp.125-6.

Why were bases so important to the maritime empires and why could the Cape be the target of an enemy attack? In wartime a fundamental strategic difference existed between attacks on commercial ports and attacks on naval bases (or potential naval bases). With an attack on commercial ports there usually was a material or even moral objective (to injure an enemy), while attacks on naval bases had a wider strategic aim: militarily it would be to cripple the naval ability of an opponent, to deny it the power or ability to act in a specific area or sea, or to attack the seaborne communications of an opponent. An enemy's fleet could be driven out of a specific area or sea by direct attack and by defeat in battle, or by depriving it from the use of its bases, which means eliminating its source of supply and replenishment. This was a well substantiated principle: the Royal Navy could not operate effectively in the Mediterranean until it had a base, Gibraltar. The British knew that, if they could control Trincomalee, it would enable them to keep their squadron operational in the Bay of Bengal throughout the winter – without it, it was impossible.³⁷ Control of the Cape provided naval control of the southern oceans and the opportunity for maritime interdiction, while the Cape could be used as a launching pad for operations to the East.³⁸

Britain's strength was in her commerce because it brought wealth, while this rich commerce was secured by a powerful navy. As Mahan so poetically overemphasised: "as long as this breastplate [navy] was borne, unpierced, over the heart of the great organism, over the British islands themselves, Great Britain was – not invulnerable – but invincible". If Britain were to be beaten, her navy had to be taken out; to "command the sea approaches to the British islands will be to destroy the power of the State; as a preliminary thereto the British Navy must be neutralized by superior numbers or by superior skill".³⁹ But as the history of the period had shown, though "superior numbers" might have been available amongst Britain's naval adversaries, "superior skill" was not and it was sea power that ensured British greatness.

By being able to support the French naval squadrons during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War and numerous Dutch naval squadrons after the war, the Cape had shown itself capable of acting as a naval base. As a result it was of value to Britain not only because of the sea route to India and as a place of replenishment, but also as a base which could act as an operational staging post for military operations in the South Atlantic and in the Indian Ocean. Britain took particular note of the events of 1781. When De Suffren reached the Cape before Johnstone, he secured

³⁶ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire*, I, pp.170.

³⁷ H.W. Richmond, *Imperial Defence and Capture at Sea in War*, p.109.

³⁸ N.A.M. Rodger, 'The British View of the Functioning of the Anglo-Dutch Alliance, 1688-1795' in G.J.A. Raven and N.A.M. Rodger (eds), *Navies and Armies*, p.27.

³⁹ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire*, I, pp.327-8.

the “key to naval operations throughout the Indian Ocean” from their perspective. It safeguarded the French islands in the Indian Ocean and provided De Suffren with the opportunity to gravely embarrass British operations on land and at sea in the Indian Ocean.⁴⁰ In British strategic thinking, the relationship between the Cape and the two French Islands in the Indian Ocean was significant as they depended on the Cape for supplies. The British believed that if they were able to cut the flow of supplies to these islands, it would cripple the French naval activity in the Indian Ocean and it would have the benefit of protecting the vulnerable St Helena Island from French aggression, using the Cape as a base.

The EEIC still held a monopoly of British trade to the East and British merchant vessels involved in this trade had to have a licence from the Company. In India the EEIC assisted with expanding British sovereignty across the subcontinent and in the process it was transformed from a commercial institution into a governing institution. Despite strategic considerations, the Cape was important to the EEIC from a replenishment point of view. Scurvy was still a major threat to British seamen and even as late as 1789 a homeward bound East Indiamen was so badly struck that only four men were on deck when she reached St Helena Island.⁴¹ The Island, however, was dependant on foreign supplies and with French activity in the Indian Ocean, a call at the Cape for fresh provisions seemed to be a logic solution. The EEIC therefore appointed an agent, John Pringle, to the Cape. Pringle took up residence at his new posting in April 1794.⁴²

British warships frequented the Cape and British East Indiamen were often, even in peacetime, escorted. When the Dutch frigate *Scipio* arrived at the Cape on 27 March 1792 three Dutch warships (Staringh’s squadron) were in the bay as well as a British frigate and East Indiamen, while another British frigate escorting an East Indiaman arrived soon afterwards. *Scipio*’s journal is a good indication of the coming and going of warships of various nationalities at the Cape as Dutch, British, Danish, Portuguese and French warships came and went within a few months.⁴³

In the minds of British policy makers the wish to acquire the Cape from the Dutch, was alive and well long before the outbreak of the Wars of the French Revolution. The problem was just how to affect it. After the visit of the *Pigot* in 1785 Dalrymple and Pemberton became

⁴⁰ A.J. Guy, ‘British Strategy and the Cape of Good Hope in the Era of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars’ in P.B. Boyden, A.J. Guy and M. Harding (eds), *Ashes and Blood” The British Army in South Africa 1795 – 1914*, Volume I, p.32.

⁴¹ M. Arkin, *John Company at the Cape*, pp.189 and 191.

⁴² *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Elphinstone – Dundas, 3/7/1795, p.105.

⁴³ NAN 2.01.29.03 – 9, *Journal gehouden aan boord van ’t Lands fregat Scipio*, from 6/8/1791 to 17/7/1796, see specifically 27/3/1792, 5/4/1792, 25/4/1792, 11/6/1792, 18/6/1792, 16/1/1793, 17/1/1793 and 29/1/1793.

enthusiastic proponents of a British settlement along the coast of South Africa. Pemberton suggested that the British should establish a refreshment station on the shores of the “Croem Riviere Bay”, as a station in this fertile, wooded area, thinly inhabited by the Dutch, would be of “... utmost benefit to this Nation in General and to the Honourable East India Company in particular”. As Britain, from the Channel to the coast of India, did not possess “a port capable of affording Shelter and protection or refreshment to their ships... it is presumed that the possession of a port on this Coast will be considered as an object of National importance... In the event of a war with Holland it will enable us more effectually to attack their Settlements on this Coast ...”.⁴⁴

Dundas was not disinclined to such ideas, but as the VOC was close to bankruptcy he thought perhaps the British could acquire the Cape cheaply and with little effort. His diplomatic efforts during peacetime failed, yet he still hoped that some compromise could be reached with the Dutch on the Cape issue. With the war clouds gathering, the EEIC Directors wrote to Dundas that the French islands in the Indian Ocean (Mauritius and Reunion) posed a threat to British shipping. Because these islands were provisioned from the Cape, they thought that “the security of the Dutch settlement should be guarantied by British naval protection”.⁴⁵ Moreover, the 1793 negotiations on stationing British military reinforcements at the Cape had failed (as the preceding discussion showed) which increased and British anxiety about the safety of the Cape – specifically after British intelligence reported in April 1794 that the Dutch believed France had six warships in the Indian Ocean and they feared this force might be used to attack the Cape.⁴⁶ By the end of 1794, as the Dutch position weakened, Dundas was of the opinion that “if the French get possession ... of the Dutch government ... their first act will be to send a French force to the Cape ... We must be beforehand with them”.⁴⁷ On 16 November 1794 Dundas proposed to Grenville that they sent troops to the Cape the following January, an argument Sir Francis Baring, Director of the EEIC supported, since the Cape was “not commercially viable as a colony, but keeping it out of French hands was a vital necessity”.⁴⁸ Notwithstanding these sentiments, Britain was not at war with the Dutch and there was really nothing Dundas could do.

⁴⁴ The Report by Lieutenant Pemberton is in the Pitt Papers and is quoted in M. Arkin, John Company at the Cape, p.190.

⁴⁵ M. Arkin, John Company at the Cape, p.191.

⁴⁶ W.G. Perrin (ed), *The Keith Papers*, I, p.208.

⁴⁷ Dundas – Grenville, 16/11/1794, quoted in C.J. de Villiers, *Die Britse Vloot aan die Kaap*, p.2.

⁴⁸ M. Boucher and N. Penn (eds), *Britain at the Cape*, p.20.

4. BRITISH OBJECTIVES AND THE BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

After France invaded the Netherlands, the British believed that the security of the vital Cape route was threatened and the occupation of the Cape became a strategic priority. On 4 January 1795 Sir Francis Baring proposed to Henry Dundas that they capture the Cape of Good Hope as it may be surprised, but might later be more difficult to conquer, "if the French garrison it". Baring explained that the Cape was important for two reasons, firstly as a place of refreshment for EEIC ships, with no comparable substitute, and secondly he was worried about the safety of EEIC shipping, stating that whoever is "master of the Cape will be able to protect or annoy our ships".⁴⁹ On 12 January 1795 Baring again begged Dundas to take the Cape of Good Hope, reiterating his motivation of 4 January and stating the "basis of the plan is to carry the Cape by surprise and not by siege which would require more extensive preparations". Baring added that secrecy was crucial, though not impossible if the right officers were selected and concluded that although the advantages that could be derived from the Cape as a Colony would be limited, the disadvantages of having the Cape in French hands would be grave, since "It commands the passage to and from India as effectively as Gibraltar does the Mediterranean...".⁵⁰ In Dundas, Baring had a willing, able and powerful ally.

British decision-makers were convinced that if France had control of the Cape, the "feather in the hands of Holland" would become a "sword in the hands of France".⁵¹ They decided to act decisively and resolved to take control of the Cape, as they had to protect the sea route and defend India against French aggression. Prominent politicians entertained the idea of the exiled Prince Willem of Orange (then living at Kew) authorising Dutch possessions to place themselves under the protection of the British, to be returned as soon as the Stadtholder was restored. Grenville wrote to the Duke of York on 1 February 1795 requesting that he obtain such an order from the Stadtholder and even added a draft letter for the Prince's signature.⁵²

Sir Francis Baring cautioned Henry Dundas that they should not place too much reliance on a letter from the Stadtholder as he "had no real authority ... His title is sufficiently descriptive of his situation, which is well known to every Dutchmen, and therefore too much stress ought not

⁴⁹ NAUK WO1/323, Cape of Good Hope, Baring – Dundas, 4/1/1795, pp.1-2.

⁵⁰ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Baring – Dundas, 12/1/1795, pp.19-23.

⁵¹ M. Boucher and N. Penn (eds), *Britain at the Cape, 1795-1803*, Blankett – Nepean, 25/1/1795, p.22.

⁵² G.W. Eybers (ed), *Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History*, Grenville – York, 1/2/1795, pp.1-2.

to be laid on the use of the name ... as I doubt whether the Dutch at the Cape would place any confidence in surrendering to the Stadtholder as Trustee in behalf of their own Country". He therefore warned that the officers negotiating with the Cape "to obtain a surrender, should be apprised of this circumstance [and] be prepared on the subject".⁵³

Prince Willem V issued a letter to the Cape authorities (not the one Grenville drafted though) on 7 February 1795. He authorized Dutch naval commanders to allow British warships to defend the Cape against the French. The Governor was also ordered to receive the British troops and allow them into the Fort since they were the "Troops and Ships of a Power in Friendship and Alliance" that came to prevent the "Colony from being invaded by the French".⁵⁴ The temporary occupation of the Cape under the authority of the Prince of Orange was in line with the treaty of 1788, as the British concurred to defend the Dutch Republic and its possessions against the French. Two days after the Prince of Orange signed the letter, the British ordered all Dutch ships in British ports to be seized,⁵⁵ while Dundas issued orders to the same effect to the British Navy in the Indian Ocean on 16 February.⁵⁶

Urgent effort to despatch a force to the Cape quickly gained momentum. Dundas notified Captain John Blankett on 16 February that their intelligence indicated that France will try to obtain the Cape of Good Hope, while Britain wanted "to prevent the execution of such a design". As a result 3000 troops from the 78th, 83rd, 95th and 98th Regiments and a detachment Royal Artillery had to proceed to the Cape as soon as possible to place the "said settlement in our possession". As the Cape garrison was "so very inconsiderable", Dundas assured Blankett that, unless French military support arrived, "the conquest might possibly not be difficult".⁵⁷ The British considered the French threat to the Cape as real and Dundas warned Lieutenant-General Abercromby, British Commander-in-Chief in India, on 19 February 1795 that their intelligence indicated that the Dutch possessions in the Indies might receive instructions to accept French troop reinforcements at any day.⁵⁸

Blankett was ordered to embark Major-General James Henry Craig and 515 soldiers of the 78th Regiment on 16 February. Blankett was made a Commodore for the purpose of the expedition and his flagship was the *HMS America* (64), a third rate ship of the line. He had two

⁵³ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Baring – Dundas, 12/1/1795, pp.22-4.

⁵⁴ *Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History*, Order from the Prince of Orange to the Governor of the Cape of Good Hope, 7/2/1795, pp.2-3.

⁵⁵ C.J. de Villiers, *Die Britse Vloot aan die Kaap, 1795-1803*, p.3.

⁵⁶ NAUK WO6/20, Secretary of State Entry Book, Dundas – Officer Commanding His Majesty's ships and vessels in the Indian seas, 23/2/1795, p.49.

⁵⁷ NAUK WO6/20, Secretary of State Entry Book, Dundas – Blankett, 16/2/1795, pp.1-7.

⁵⁸ NAUK WO6/20. Secretary of State Entry Book, Dundas – Abercromby, 19/2/1795, p.31.

more third rate ships, *HMS Ruby* (64) and *HMS Stately* (64) as well as the sloop *HMS Echo* (16) under his command.⁵⁹ Speed and secrecy were of the essence and Dundas told Craig that since Blankett's warships were not able to embark the whole force, he had to command the advance guard of the main expedition, while the rest would soon follow. Though the force may seem inconsiderable, the service is so "urgent and important that by waiting for the remainder of the troops the object might possible be defeated".⁶⁰ Remarkably, only eleven days later, Blankett's squadron with Craig's men onboard was able to weigh anchor at Spithead. However, due to adverse winds, they were only clear of the coast by middle March.⁶¹

John Blankett had experience of serving in the East, as he was part of Admiral Hughes squadron and was the Captain of the *HMS Nymph* during the notorious *La Mouche* incident of 1779.⁶² In 1790 Blankett was placed in command of a convoy despatched to China, and visited the Cape as Captain of the *HMS Leopard* early in 1791. Van de Graaff reported the visit to the Stadtholder and apparently tried his utmost, without success, to find out what the object of Blankett's secret orders was.⁶³ Blankett often commented on strategic matters and warned Evan Nepean (Under Secretary of the War Department) that the Cape's location made it ideal to develop into "... in a nest of pirates, secure and unattackable amongst their own rocks".⁶⁴ He knew the Cape of Good Hope well and was an advocate for British control over the Cape. Though Blankett was not blessed with influential family connections to advance his career, he had vast experience in amphibious operations and also participated in the capture of Quebec in 1759. He was fluent in French, Italian and Portuguese and was "universally esteemed, not only a dependable and capable officer, but as an accomplished and amiable gentlemen...".⁶⁵

The British plan was to invade the Cape and conquer it, not to conduct a raid. In other words, to assault the Cape with "fighting forces in such strength as to be capable of compelling submission".⁶⁶ The meaning of an action is in its objective, or even in its result, as an attack had to be decisive and the enemy forced to submit, while raids were usually aimed at weakening the enemy, either materially, strategically or morally. Though the objective of the Johnstone

⁵⁹ NAUK WO6/20, Secretary of State Entry Book, Dundas – Blankett, 16/2/1795, pp.1-7; and W.G. Perrin (ed), *The Keith Papers*, I, pp.215-6.

⁶⁰ NAUK WO6/20, Secretary of State Entry Book, Dundas to Craig, 16/2/1795, pp.12-3.

⁶¹ NAUK ADM51/1136, Captains Logs, Journal of the Proceedings of His Majesty's Ship *America* Commodore Blankett Commander, 16/2/1795 to 27/1/1797, see 27/2/1695 and 16/3/1795.

⁶² *Kaapse Archiefstukken 1779*, Dagregister, 29/7/1779 and 1/11/1779, pp.186 and 205.

⁶³ NAN 1.01.50 – 1189, Eenige Missiven ..., Van de Graaff – Stadhouder, 28/1/1791.

⁶⁴ W.G. Perrin (ed), *The Keith Papers*, I, p.214.

⁶⁵ L. Stephen (ed), *Dictionary of National Biography*, Volume V, p.205.

⁶⁶ H.W. Richmond, *Imperial Defence and Capture at Sea in War*, p.116.

expedition was to capture the Cape in the end it was nothing more than a raid. Dundas knew this well, he studied the Johnstone expedition and wished to avoid a repetition.

The main problem the attackers faced related to security at sea and supporting the land forces ashore during the campaign. The answer was essentially in secrecy, speed, stealth and surprise – to act expediently, slip out and reach your objective without your enemy knowing, or before he could act. Then sufficient naval forces must be available to cover and defend an expedition at sea and while operations ashore took place, sufficient naval defence also had to be at hand. Maritime power projection to a territory across the oceans (such as the Cape) involved a great logistic and organisational effort. These principles were well understood by British statesmen, sailors and soldiers of the late eighteenth century.

Dundas notified the First Lord of the Admiralty Board (Lord Spencer) during February that he wished to appoint the renowned Admiral Sir John Jervis (the later Earl of St Vincent) to command the expedition. Jervis was not appointed, probably due to ill-health,⁶⁷ and in his stead Rear-Admiral Sir George Keith Elphinstone was appointed as “Commander-in-Chief of a squadron to be employed upon a particular service”.⁶⁸ Elphinstone hoisted his flag on the *HMS Monarch* (74) on 10 March 1795 and was informed that he will receive formal orders from the Secretary of State. Elphinstone was a good choice, since he had seen service with the British East India Company and knew the severe sea conditions around the Cape. He was known as a consistent officer with the ability to act independently and was capable of planning and organising such a maritime campaign. On 1 June 1795, Elphinstone’s promotion to Vice-Admiral came into effect.⁶⁹

Once the preparations got underway Dundas gave orders directly to the naval commanders concerned and notified both Blankett and Elphinstone that if any delay arose with equipping the ships, they should report it directly to him, so that the “... proper measures may be taken for removing them in the present instance, and preventing similar impediments”.⁷⁰ This initially caused some tension between Elphinstone, the Admiralty and Dundas, but it did ensure quick and effective preparations, while direct communication with the political head (Dundas) was possible during the expedition. One important shortcoming in the planning of the

⁶⁷ J.S. Corbett (ed), *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer First Lord of the Admiralty 1794-1801*, Volume I, Dundas – Spencer, February 1795 (no day), p.28.

⁶⁸ W.G. Perrin (ed), *The Keith Papers*, I, p.214.

⁶⁹ NAUK ADM50/64, Admirals Journals, Vice Admiral Elphinstone, *Monarch*, for the period 4/4/1795 to 13/11/1797, see 1/6/1795.

⁷⁰ W.G. Perrin (ed), *The Keith Papers*, I, pp.215-6.

expedition, which is also discrediting to Dundas' ability as administrator, is the fact that the expedition was allowed to sail without field artillery and money.

On 3 April Elphinstone's force departed. He had three third rate ships of the line: his flagship *HMS Monarch* (74), *HMS Arrogant* (74) and *HMS Victorious* (74) as well as the frigate *HMS Sphynx* (24), the sloop *Rattlesnake* (16) and the East Indiaman *Arniston*.⁷¹ The main body of troops under Major-General Alured Clarke was supposed to sail with Elphinstone, but as they were not ready by 3 April, Elphinstone sailed without them. Clarke's force, some 3000 soldiers, eventually sailed onboard East Indiamen under the command of Captain James Rees of the EEIC on 15 May, with the *HMS Hector* as escort.⁷² They arrived at St Salvador, on the Brazilian coast on 7 July, where they had to await further orders from Elphinstone.⁷³ Clarke's orders were issued on 4 May 1795, which were twelve days before the Batavian-French treaty.⁷⁴ Yet, he was plainly ordered that if Elphinstone and Blankett were not successful in acquiring the Cape, he had to assist them and make "an immediate and vigorous attack on the Cape to take possession of the Colony in His Majesty's name".⁷⁵ For the British decision makers their objective was clear – to have the Cape, the one way or the other!

While at sea (on 9 April) Elphinstone issued orders to his Captains: If the squadron separated, they had to act civilly towards officials and inhabitants of Dutch provinces. If they were to meet any Dutch warships at sea the Dutch Captains must be requested to place themselves under the command of the British. If they declined, they should be compelled to do it and if necessary the British Captains had to "... exercise force for that purpose and take possession of his ship". If they met Dutch merchant ships at sea that did not have proof that they will land their cargoes in Britain, they had to be captured.⁷⁶ The Dutch were indeed treated like an enemy.

Blankett and Elphinstone's two British squadrons rendezvoused off Cape Point on 10 June, but a strong wind prevented them from entering False Bay. They sailed into the bay the

⁷¹ NAUK ADM50/64, Admirals Journals, Vice Admiral Elphinstone, *Monarch*, see 4/4/1795.

⁷² NAUK WO1/893, East India Company, Memorial of Captain James Rees Commodore of the Fleet of East India Ships which sailed from England in May 1795 with troops on a secret expedition on behalf of himself and the Commanders and officers employed under him on that expedition, to the Court of Directors of the East India Company, 31/5/1797, p.131.

⁷³ A. Allardyce, *Memoir of the Honourable George Keith Elphinstone*, p.86.

⁷⁴ S.F.N. Gie, 'The Cape Colony under Company Rule, 1708-1795' in E.A. Walker (ed), *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, p.175.

⁷⁵ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Clarke's Orders from the Horse Guards, 4/5/1795, pp.38-9.

⁷⁶ *The Keith Papers*, I, G.K. Elphinstone, General Instructions to Squadron, 9/4/1795, pp.251-3.

following day and were off Simon's Bay at 16:00.⁷⁷ However, was the Cape ready to resist an invading force?

5. THE SITUATION AT THE CAPE IN THE TWILIGHT OF THE VOC

With the VOC in decline, the dire situation at the Cape and its mismanagement was already common knowledge for a number of years by the time the Wars of the French Revolution broke out. Already in 1789, when Vaillant visited the Cape, he argued that if the future of the Dutch Republic was linked to trade with the East and the Cape was essential for maintaining that trade, then the way in which the Cape was managed and defended needed serious consideration. Vaillant was emphatic that the Cape was neglected, VOC management was very poor, abuses and mismanagement were widespread, its economy was in a slump, everybody was unhappy (either with the VOC or the Governor) and discontent was on the increase. The status quo should not be maintained and the Cape had to be managed differently from the other VOC possessions. Both Vaillant and Van der Hoop suggested a free trade zone at the Cape as they thought commerce and freedom of navigation would stimulate the economy and agricultural production and create more prosperity.⁷⁸ Vaillant added that the Cape needed a political body with executive powers and warned that the Dutch would not maintain their grip on the Cape: "Compagnie, nog de republicq niet in staat was zig in het bezit van de Caap te handhaaven".⁷⁹

By the 1790's Cape burghers openly showed their contempt for the VOC government and after the depletion of the garrison, the VOC authority withered even more. Revolutionary voices were heard amongst the burghers and while some burghers wanted the Cape directly under the control of the Dutch States General, others were in favour of complete independence.

5.1. Commissioners-General Nederburgh and Frijkenius at the Cape

For years much concern had existed in the Netherlands about the survival of the VOC. As a result a special commission was created to investigate its affairs. One of the outcomes of their reports (February and July 1791) was to create a board to investigate misuses in the Indies and rectify it. The board consisted of the Chief Advocate of the VOC, Sebastian Cornelis

⁷⁷ NAUK WO1/323, Journal G.K. Elphinstone, June 1795, p.263.

⁷⁸ S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, Van der Hoop – Vaillant, 19/10/1789 and Vaillant – Van der Hoop, 4/12/1790, pp.191-2 and 204.

⁷⁹ S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, Vaillant – Van der Hoop, 5/9/1789 and Vaillant – Van der Hoop, 4/12/1790, pp.185-7 and 204.

Nederburgh, a senior naval officer, Captain Simon Hendrik Frijkenius and two senior VOC officials, Willem Arnold Alting and Hendrik van Stokkum. They had wide powers and their delegation, issued on 19 August 1791 in the name of the Prince of Orange and the *Heeren XVII*, ordered them to investigate all VOC affairs, bring to light corruption and misuses, make reforms, dismiss and have corrupt officials tried in the Netherlands, appoint trustworthy men and get rid of all unnecessary and costly expenses.⁸⁰

According to Nederburgh the condition of the VOC was in by 1791, could be characterised as “het diep verval ... de bijna hopelooze ... bekende weerloze toestand... wanordens en misbruiken in het bestuur...”.⁸¹ This, he stated, was caused by a series of events, such as the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, but he believed that it was not too late to still salvage the situation. Two members of the board had to undertake inspection visits to VOC possessions. The task fell upon Nederburgh and Frijkenius, and they received the titles Commissioners-General with wide powers to take drastic measures.

On 18 June 1792 the Dutch frigate *Amazoon* sailed into Simon's Bay with Commissioner-Generals Nederburgh and Frijkenius on board. Nederburgh and Frijkenius went ashore in Simon's Bay and left for Cape Town on 23 June. Dragoons escorted them from Muizenberg to Cape Town and many spectators watched as they arrived. That evening a ball was held in the Castle and Nederburgh told all present that the VOC was in bad state (“de allernoodlottigste omstandigheden”), that it was necessary for everybody to make sacrifices to improve things, while those guilty of misconduct had to be punished.⁸² The next day Nederburgh told the Council of Policy that although the Cape was valuable as a replenishment station, its bad management (probably referring to Van de Graaff), had made it a liability the VOC could no longer afford, “... is geworden eene ondragelijke lastpost ... door vermeerdering van omslag, afwijking van regels van zuinigheid en goede huishouding, welke het bestier onzer voorvaderen kenmerkten”.⁸³ Full administrative authority was formally handed over to Nederburgh and Frijkenius on 3 July 1792.

Nederburgh and Frijkenius had to make sure that the administration was as cost-effective and as uncomplicated as possible, while revenue had to increase. One of the ways in which this could be achieved, was with import and export duties. In addition they made some

⁸⁰ S.C. Nederburgh, *Echte Stukken betreffende het Volbragt Onderzoek der Verrigtingen van de Generale Commissie in den Jare 1791 over de O.I. Bezittingen van den Staat en de Kaab de Goede Hoop*, pp.135-56.

⁸¹ S.C. Nederburgh, *Echte Stukken betreffende het Volbragt Onderzoek...*, pp.iv-vi.

⁸² C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, I, pp.64-7.

⁸³ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, I, p.68.

trade concessions to the burghers and investigated the discontent in the colony in an effort to rectify abuses.⁸⁴ They therefore focussed on immediate and practical issues and on administrative streamlining, rather than on large scale changes and theoretical proposals.

Defence was probably not one of the most important aspects the Dutch wished to address. However, the Nederburgh and Frijkenius era was overshadowed by the gathering war clouds and one of the first things they dealt with at the Cape was its defence, specifically as it was inadequate. This was a difficult issue and they sought to co-operate with the military authorities, while they also investigated the suggestions of the Military Commission. Ironically, their tenure at the Cape introduced a new era of fortification building and repair, even though the process was halted shortly before.

Nederburgh and Frijkenius quickly became embroiled in the bitter animosity between Gordon and De Sandol-Roy. Gordon had De Sandol-Roy put in irons just before their arrival and De Sandol-Roy appealed to them for his release. They granted it, but two days later Gordon requested the arrest of De Sandol-Roy. Gordon repeated his request on 11 July, 21 September and 31 October; adding a statement with 45 accusations against De Sandol-Roy signed by 26 individuals. Nederburgh and Frijkenius decided to arrest Sandol-Roy again and to dispatch him to Batavia for a fair trial. De Sandol-Roy complained bitterly and asked to be released and exempted of the charges.⁸⁵ In their effort to keep both sides happy, Nederburgh and Frijkenius had De Sandol-Roy depart on the ship *Regt door Zee*, but instructed its Captain to release him, and treat him with due respect as soon as they reached the open sea. Governor-General Alting was requested to subject De Sandol-Roy to a fair legal investigation and was told that the dispute between Gordon and De Sandol-Roy had become improper. In Batavia De Sandol-Roy protested that he had to endure three years of constant persecution and in May 1793 the Council of Justice in Batavia found that they did not have enough evidence to prosecute.⁸⁶ When Gordon received news about this, he complained to Nederburgh and Frijkenius and asked for the case to be reviewed. They promised to review it, once they arrived in Batavia. This never happened. When they arrived in Batavia there was such an utter need for capable officers that De Sandol-Roy was appointed as a Major in the VOC military establishment and was soon afterwards promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel.

⁸⁴ G.M. Theal, *History of Africa South of the Zambesi*, III, p.264.

⁸⁵ See the correspondence on the De Sandol-Roy affair in the documents of Commissioners-General, summarized in CA C657, Register van alle zdanige Brieven..., 20/6/1792 and 22/6/1792, p.39; 25/6/1792,p.40; 21/9/1792, p.53; 31/10/1792, p.62; CA C689, 26/6/1792, pp.4-6; and C662, Nederburg and Frijkenius – High Council of the Indies, 6/11/1792, pp.44-52.

⁸⁶ See the discussion on the affair in A.J. Boeseken, *Die Nederlandse Kommissaris*, pp.100-2.

The *Nationaal Bataillon* was the nucleus of the defensive forces of the Cape and the *Heeren XVII* had established its size at 600 infantrymen and 400 artillerymen in October 1790. The battalion was organised into five companies with about 450 men. After the Commissioners-General inspected the Garrison and attended a military exercise with the soldiers firing their weapons, they expressed their satisfaction with its military bearing, tactical behaviour and readiness. But they were not so impressed with its tattered equipment and allowed the military authorities to request some new equipment from the VOC.⁸⁷ Nederburgh and Frijkenius must have realised from the information they had, the work of the Military Commission and the opinion of previous Commissioners, that the troops available to defend the Cape were insufficient. Yet, when they made their recommendations, the size of the Garrison was set at the 1768-69 levels (about 450 men), due to the financial problems of the VOC⁸⁸ and they did not allow soldiers to be lifted from ships en route to Batavia, to make up for the shortfall.⁸⁹ However, after France declared war, they temporarily allowed some soldiers to be taken from ships to strengthen the Garrison.

The Commissioners-General also changed the salary dispensation of soldiers. Soldiers received their full payment (including allowances) on a monthly basis, while ill soldiers relieved from hospital had to take up light duty in the Garrison with full salary as “rekonvalesent” or recovering soldiers of the line. The Cape authorities were very critical of the *pasganger* system and wanted to do away with it, as many of these individuals were not soldiers any longer (“haast geen Soldaaten meer”), but became labourers or artisans.⁹⁰ However, as the VOC approved it in October 1790, it could not be disbanded and many soldiers augmented their scant salaries in this way. Though Nederburgh and Frijkenius did not approve of the system, they limited it by not allowing officials, except those on the Council of Policy, to make use of *pasgangers*.⁹¹

Nederburgh and Frijkenius supported the idea that officers should rotate between the various VOC stations. They did not agree with the practice of appointing senior officers in the Netherlands for overseas service with the VOC. The problem was that such officers were often appointed above loyal officers that had served the VOC a long time without promotion and they

⁸⁷ A.J. Boeseken, *Die Nederlandse Kommissarisse*, p.104; and CA C657, Register van alle zodanige Brieven..., 8/10/1792, p.56.

⁸⁸ CA C660, Nederburg and Frijkenius – Council of Policy, No 42, 25/9/1792, p.62.

⁸⁹ CA C670, Nederburg and Frijkenius – Council of Policy, No 187, 22/4/1793, pp.136-7.

⁹⁰ C190, Resolutiën, 19/11/1790, pp.200-320, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁹¹ CA C694, Nederburg and Frijkenius Report and Attachments, 24/7/1793, pp.72-4 and 76.

suggested that officers dispatched from the Netherlands should not be above the rank of Ensign.⁹²

The Commissioners-General also tried to improve the administrative control over the military establishment and wanted more of the managerial functions to be centralised in the *Hoofd der Militie*. They praised Gordon's outstanding diligence and lack of self-interest in commanding the military establishment for more than thirteen years: "departement der Militie ... met een buyten gemeene ijver en voorbeeldige belangeloosheid in de beste orde heeft gebragt en bestierd".⁹³ As proof of their gratitude, and in recognition of his service to the VOC, they awarded him with a special bonus of 1500 *Riksdalders*. Nederburgh and Frijkenius thought that Gordon would not be able to conduct his work with enough zeal if he had to attend all the meetings of the Council of Policy, and he was given permission to only attend meetings that related to his function.

Despite previous confirmation regarding his responsibilities, Gordon was apparently still uncertain and asked the Commissioners-General to clarify a number of matters relating to his authority, his command of the artillery and fortifications and the authority of the Governor (specifically regarding defence planning, the creation of batteries without his knowledge and the promotion of officers). These questions were a clear indication of the uneasy footing of the defence establishment at the Cape and also related to the problems between Gordon and Van de Graaff. Nederburgh and Frijkenius seemed surprised at the questions as they had just confirmed his status. Nevertheless, they clarified the situation by answering him briefly. As the defence of the Cape was the ultimate responsibility of the Governor, Gordon was subordinate to the Governor and he would not be able to undertake any military actions without the approval of the Governor. The Governor must delegate all military matters to the Garrison Commander, who must then execute the orders. He had to report to the Governor on all matters concerning defence – from exercises to armaments and inspections. All officers and men in the infantry, artillery and engineering branches were under Gordon's command and the Governor would have to notify him if he wished to place soldiers on farms, or wanted to promote somebody. With the Governor's approval he had the jurisdiction to inspect batteries and hold artillery exercises. The Governor had to discuss the placing of batteries and guns with Gordon, who then had to communicate his opinion to the Governor in the correct way.⁹⁴ The Council of Policy

⁹² CA C694, Nederburg and Frijkenius Report and Attachments, 24/7/1793, p.74.

⁹³ CA C667, Nederburg and Frijkenius – Council of Policy, 21/2/1793, p.116; and C213, Resolutiën, 26/2/1793, pp.280-2.

⁹⁴ CA C215, Resolutiën, 2/4/1795, pp.62-3; and CA C670, Nederburgh en Frijkenius – Council of Policy, 3/4/1793, pp.51-3.

emphasised that thought defence was the ultimate responsibility of the Governor; all military decisions had to be made in consultation with Gordon.⁹⁵ It is evident that some lessons learnt were addressed to prevent a repetition of the Gordon-Van de Graaff situation. Gordon's status was set, command and control was centralised, and for the first time in thirteen years he was really in full command of the whole military establishment.

As the events of the French Revolution unfolded in Europe and France declared war against Austria, Nederburgh and Frijkenius realised that a crisis was looming and by August 1792 they were very concerned about the war. As it was not possible for all farmers in far-off districts to do piquet duty at the Cape for long periods due to the security situation in the interior,⁹⁶ the Commissioners-General considered how the Cape authorities should act in the event of an enemy attack ("vijandelijke attacques"). By November 1792 lists of the militia were compiled on which it was stipulated who had to come to the Cape and who had to stay in the interior in an emergency.⁹⁷

When the Military Commission returned to the Cape late in 1792, they were very disappointed about the fact that their suggestions were not implemented and the fortifications had become dilapidated. Vaillant complained to Nederburgh and Frijkenius about it, but not much could be done due to the dire economic situation.⁹⁸ Yet, as news from Europe indicated by December 1792 that a war with France might be imminent, Nederburgh and Frijkenius ordered Major Fischer of the Artillery to test all the guns on the fortifications, while Thibault was ordered to make haste with repair work on the batteries and erect more ovens for red-hot-shot.⁹⁹ Though the news of the war that reached the Cape at the end of April 1793 was not a surprise, the defence of the Cape was still not ready.

Nederburgh and Frijkenius were in charge of the Cape for a period of fifteen months. During this time they did manage to reduce expenditure, levied higher and new taxes on a whole variety of items, reduced the VOC slaves to 450, sold all the VOC horses and vehicles and ordered every soldier and sailor that could be spared at the Cape to Batavia. Most of their measures might have been necessary, but no doubt, with a global war raging and the VOC on the verge of bankruptcy, the situation at the Cape was definitely less optimistic by the time they departed.

⁹⁵ C215, Resolutiën, 8/4/1793, pp.144-203, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁹⁶ C217, Resolutiën, 23/7/1793, pp.2-73, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁹⁷ A.J. Boeseken, *Die Nederlandse Kommissaris*, p.107n.

⁹⁸ S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, Vaillant – Van der Hoop, 7/11/1792, p.226.

⁹⁹ CA C210, Resolutiën, 11/12/1792, pp.97-100.

Uncertainty existed about the governorship of the colony. Van de Graaff was still the official Governor, but he would not return. The Commissioners-General did not regard Secunde Rhenius as ideal for the post. At that stage an older and more experienced VOC official from Surat, Abraham Josias Sluysken, happened to pass on his way to retirement in Europe. Nederburgh and Frijkenius convinced him to accept the appointment of Commissioner-General at the Cape, with authority equal to theirs. On 2 September 1793 he was conferred in the post. Sluysken had more authority than a Governor and could act without consulting the Council of Policy. He was regarded as a knowledgeable, grave and dignified individual well in control of his faculties, but he had his work cut out for him as the Cape was probably worse off than ever in its VOC history.¹⁰⁰ Sluysken had no military background, as his professional experience evolved around the conduct of business, yet Nederburgh and Frijkenius emphasised that he was personally responsible for defence, “het poliicque bestuur als de defensie deezer Colonie in persoon uit te oeffenen ...”.¹⁰¹ To his credit, Sluysken immediately realised that the defence of the Cape was priority and in his first letter to the *Heeren XVII*, he complained about the weak garrison.¹⁰²

5.2. The Economic and Political Situation at the Cape

As the VOC drifted into bankruptcy, their last years at the Cape became a period of extreme economic crisis. Through its monopolistic policies the VOC had discouraged the development of local industry. As a result the population outside Cape Town could do little less than farm, while in Cape Town some kept lodges and participated in various types of trade. Farmers had to sell their products to the VOC at low prices, while they had to rely on foreign visitors to get rid of their surpluses. Foreign ships visiting the Cape became less from 1793 onwards due to the war in Europe and it seems that only 86 ships visited the Cape in 1794 (of which 37 were Dutch).¹⁰³ This provided even less opportunity for imports and exports, caused a shortage of coinage and much want for merchandise and consumer goods. An economic crisis developed at the Cape as no market existed for surplus wheat and wine, while items such as textiles and cloth, iron,

¹⁰⁰ G.M. Theal, *History of Africa South of the Zambesi*, III, pp.299-300; and C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, II, p.53.

¹⁰¹ C218, Resolutiën, 4/9/1793, pp.32-86, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁰² CA C1860, Brieven van A.J. Sluysken, Sluysken – *Heeren XVII*, 15/10/1793, pp.113-4.

¹⁰³ T.R.H. Davenport, *South Africa. A Modern History*, p.39; and G.M. Theal, *History of Africa South of the Zambesi*, III, p.298.

copper, agricultural implements, coffee and tea became very scarce.¹⁰⁴ The position was made worse by the fact that the VOC was bankrupt and had to cut its expenses as far as possible.

The burghers experienced the inflationary effects of an over-printing of paper money (first issued in 1782). By the time Sluysken took over very little coinage was in circulation, with more paper money than before and much reluctance to trade with it. In the country barter was often more popular than accepting paper money.¹⁰⁵ The vain attempts by Nederburgh and Frijkenius, to bring about severe cutbacks in VOC expenditure did not relieve the plight of the Cape merchants and farmers. Trade concessions were made and a number of Cape merchants bought small trading vessels and started to trade with St Helena, the Indian Ocean Islands, the Far East and even Europe. However, the trade was not very successful; some of the ships stranded and due to the effect of the war their poorly armed vessels became easy prey for enemy cruisers.¹⁰⁶ If the VOC had allowed Cape merchants to become involved in commercial shipping earlier, it might have meant much for the economic development of the Cape.

While Van de Graaff squandered much money and the VOC could not sustain it, Nederburgh and Frijkenius did succeed in bringing the high expenses of the Cape down, but at what price? By 1789, the cost of running the Cape was f1744361, while its income was only f341474. Nederburgh and Frijkenius, with the assistance of Sluysken's fine administration, brought it down to f817881 by 1794, while the income grew to f588260.¹⁰⁷ However, the population were financially in a stranglehold, while the burghers were deeply dissatisfied with the economic situation and the depreciation of their currency.¹⁰⁸

An interesting report by a contemporary military visitor is that of Captain Cornelis de Jong of the Dutch frigate *Scipio*. He visited the Cape twice while on convoy duty; first from March 1792 to May 1793, and again from November 1794 to May 1795. Due to his official position and his close personnel friendship with Sluysken, he had a thorough knowledge of the events taking place in the Colony. He was a fine observer and his first hand account of events at the Cape is accurate and reliable.¹⁰⁹ In 1792 he held the opinion that the Cape was a blossoming place, "... een bloeiend land is, dat de koophandel welgaat en de winsten grof moeten wezen",¹¹⁰ but he expressed his shock at the conditions by November 1794, stating that in the short space of eighteen months people seemed to have become impoverished. He listed

¹⁰⁴ H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind, 1795-1803*, pp.29-30.

¹⁰⁵ M.W. Spilhaus, *South Africa in the Making, 1652-1806*, p.164.

¹⁰⁶ C.F.J. Muller (ed), *500 Jaar Suid Afrikaanse Geskiedenis*, pp.98-9.

¹⁰⁷ P.J. Idenburg, *De Kaap de Goede Hoop*, p.44.

¹⁰⁸ H. Giliomee and R. Elphick (eds), *'n Samelewing in Wording*, p.322.

¹⁰⁹ R.F. Kennedy, *Africana Repository*, pp.61-2.

the problems: the VOC did not provide the Cape with all the necessary requirements, there was a scarcity of manufactured goods, a shortage of coal, iron, coffee, rice, sugar, etc, the prices of agricultural products were too low and a large surplus existed, there was much inflation due to the inability of the VOC to keep up supply, the inconvertible paper currency further added to the general distress, the free trade with the Indies and the Netherlands that the Commissioners-General was supposed to establish had so many restrictions that it was difficult to carry out, and due to the war shipping had declined. A despairing attitude existed, "wij leven van God en van de vreemden" and De Jong thought the Cape "is gedurende den korten tijd van agtien maanden zoodanig verarmd en veranderd, dat het dezelfde plaats niet meer schijnt".¹¹¹

However, the situation at the Cape must not be divorced from developments in Europe and their effect. The events of the French Revolution were known at the Cape and followed with interest in some circles. On 28 January 1791 Van de Graaff wrote to the Stadtholder that the situation on Mauritius was desperate. The problems were apparently caused by a decree of the French National Assembly that made everyone equal. As a result there was no order on the ships and serious disciplinary problems in the Pondicherry Regiment, as actual murders of officers had taken place. Van de Graaff had little respect for the revolutionaries, calling them "dat gespuis". Five days later he again wrote to the Stadtholder, stating that in Mauritius everything was "in oproer en men moord er als te Parijs".¹¹²

As official news was not always available, newspapers were often important sources of intelligence to the Cape. In December 1792 newspapers that arrived with the French warship *L'Epervier* brought news about the French Revolution and of an impending war between Britain, the United Provinces and France as the French Ambassador had left The Hague, while the British representative in France was "removed". The Commissioners-General ordered the Cape defences to be kept at the ready, as an attack on the Cape could not be ruled out.¹¹³ On 6 April 1793 a secret letter from the Amsterdam *Kamer* (dated 16 December 1792) arrived at the Cape. It warned them that due to the confused state of affairs in Europe, a war between France and Britain might erupt soon, while they were ordered not to harbour any French individuals suspected of participating in the revolution. The Cape therefore had to be extra vigilant and the Council of Policy ordered Gordon to devise a defensive plan for the best possible defence of the Cape in the trying times they faced.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, I, p.118.

¹¹¹ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, II, pp.54-6.

¹¹² NAN 1.01.50 – 1189, Eenige Missiven ..., Van de Graaff – Stadhouder, 28/1/1791 and 2/2/1791.

¹¹³ CA C210, Resolutiën, 11/12/1792, pp.97-100.

¹¹⁴ C215, Resolutiën, 8/4/1793, pp.144-203, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

On 29 April a Genovese ship, *Neptune*, which departed from the Netherlands on 19 February, informed the Cape about the beheading of King Louis XVI and of the French declaration of war against Britain and the United Provinces on 7 February 1793.¹¹⁵ Emphasis was immediately placed on strengthening the defence of the Cape and the Council of Policy also decided to make sure that Mauritius and Reunion receive no provisions from the Cape. News of the war was confirmed by the British warship *HMS Queen Charlotte* that arrived in False Bay on 24 June. After news of the war reached Batavia in August 1793 the High Council of the Indies issued a warning to all the VOC possessions as French privateers had already captured four Dutch ships in the Indies. France was a public enemy and Dutch property had to be defended, while they had to act offensively and defensively against the French in the East.¹¹⁶

On 30 January 1794 the British warship *HMS Diomedé* delivered a letter (dated 30 March 1793) from the Haagsche Besoignes, the legal representatives of the VOC. In it they warned that France could soon attack the Netherlands and might overrun the country. They explained that the British offered to assist the Cape with troops from St Helena, but that the Dutch Government preferred a naval force. However, the troops might still be quartered at the Cape and they had to prepare for such a contingency.¹¹⁷ Gordon and De Wet reported to the Council of Policy that bedding and equipment for 1000 troops would be prepared and that the new hospital could serve as the barracks.¹¹⁸ The letter also notified the Cape that it was difficult for the States-General to supply enough warships to escort VOC ships, and that their ships might be taken up in British convoys.¹¹⁹ No instruction from the VOC followed and the Council of Policy took no further action on both accounts.

After this, official news became scarce and the Cape was in the dark about events in Europe. On 7 February 1795 Sluysken received a letter dated 10 October 1794 from the Chief Advocate of the VOC, P.J. Guepin, with the news that the French had already occupied part of the Netherlands. He warned that the Netherlands might suddenly change sides and as a result they had to be on their guard against an attack by any European enemy. Guepin wrote:

“Inmiddels word den Staat der republicquen zaaken alhier langs zo meer zorgelijk, de Vyand naderd van dag tot dag en heeft zich zelfs reeds van een gedeelte van het grond gebied deezer Republicq meester gemaakt. zo dat het volstrekt niet voor te zien so, welke de gevolgen na deeze criticque Situatie der publicque zaaken zullen zyn, en het allernoodzakelijkst is en blyft om altoos

¹¹⁵ *Kaapse Plakkaatboek*, IV, 30/4/1793, 2/5/1793 and 25/6/1793, pp.196-7 and 205.

¹¹⁶ NAN VOC4735, Plakkaat van de Gouverneur Generaal en de Raaden, 3/9/1793.

¹¹⁷ CA C600, Inkomende Brieven, Straalman – Gesagvoerder Kaap, 30/3/1793, pp.10-20.

¹¹⁸ G.A. le Roux, *Europese Oorloë en die Kaap*, p.130.

¹¹⁹ CA C600, Inkomende Brieven, Straalman – Gesagvoerder Kaap, 30/3/1793, pp.10-20.

en in allen gevalle zo aan de Kaap als in Indien op hoede te zijn om door geen Europese Vijand, wie het ook zoude moogen weezen te worden overvallen..."¹²⁰

This was not an official letter, but Guepin stated that a report from the *Heeren XVII* would be forthcoming. At the same time unsubstantiated reports from Swedish ships indicated that the French were making much gain – apparently S' Hertogenbosch fell on 10 October 1794 and Nijmegen on 8 November. It was feared that much of the Netherlands might already be in French hands.¹²¹

On 12 April 1795 the frigate *Medemblik*, with Captain Simon Dekker in command, arrived with two ships in convoy. Dekker brought no dispatches, but he briefed Sluysken and news about events in Europe was discussed during a secret meeting of the Council of Policy on 16 April 1795. Dekker reported that when he left Texel on 22 December 1794, the French invasion of the Netherlands was achieving much success ("de franschen veele progresseien op de Hollandse frontieren gemaakt hebben..."),¹²² while a peace agreement might be concluded with France, as two Dutch negotiators had apparently gone to Paris. With a number of VOC return ships waiting at the Cape to sail to Europe, the Council was very anxious about a possible attack from Mauritius and expected a French force to arrive any day.¹²³ However, they were unaware of the fact that in the meantime a British squadron was making for the Cape as fast as they could!

So, the Dutch Republic faced an invader and a task force was on its way to the Cape. Yet, with its economy in shambles, was there enough political unity to face an attacker? By 1795 the Cape was in essence a society in crisis. As the burghers had no real political power, they were powerless against the VOC policies that were not in the interest of the population, while at the same time the ideas of the French Revolution found acceptance amongst many of the disenchanted burghers. With much division and unhappiness, various anonymous pamphlets circulated and tension between the government and the population increased. The government tried to stop it by prohibiting the creation and distribution of letters and pamphlets aimed at putting it in a bad light, motivated people to revolt or wished to create civil disorder.¹²⁴

Political divisions ran deep. The burghers, minor officials and many of the soldiers essentially supported the *Patriotten* of the Netherlands, while most of the officials and officers

¹²⁰ C231, Resolutiën, 8/4/1795, pp.106-14, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹²¹ G.M. Theal, *History of Africa South of the Zambesi*, III, p.314.

¹²² C231, Resolutiën (Secreet), 16/4/1795, see Dekker – Sluysken, 13/4/1795, pp.115-9, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹²³ C231, Resolutiën (Secreet), 11/5/1795, pp.120-9, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹²⁴ C216, Resolutiën, 23/4/1793, pp.192-206, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

supported the House of Orange and the Stadtholder. Considerable revolutionary fervour existed in the frontier regions where VOC control was very unpopular. The burghers of the Swellendam and Graaff-Reinet districts rebelled against the authority of the government due to the economic depression and the monopolistic policies of the VOC. The rebels used revolutionary jargon and slogans, denounced aristocrats, sported tricolour cockades, etc.¹²⁵ After Landdrost Maynier of Graaff-Reinet was evicted from office in February 1795, Sluysken sent a commission to Graaff-Reinet, but it was also expelled by the burghers on 16 June 1795. In Swellendam similar events took place: the Landdrost was expelled on 17 June 1795, the burghers declared Swellendam a 'republic' and they placed their government in the hands of a representative national authority. With the war in Europe and as the British task force had in the meantime arrived in Simon's Bay, the authorities could not do much about it.¹²⁶ So, the chances of unified military action by a divided population against a well-organised opponent seemed a remote possibility.

6. THE DISPOSITION OF THE CAPE DEFENCES

The lacking defences of the Cape was common knowledge in the Netherlands and the *Heeren XVII* also knew that the British were well aware of the situation. When the States-General declined the British offer for troops in March 1793, they knew the Cape had no more than 600 infantrymen and 400 artillerists, and that it was completely inadequate: "Militaire Magt, thans aldaar voor handen zynde, op verre na niet genoegzaam zoude zyn, om aan eene Europeesche Magt het hoofd te bieden, waartoe ten minsten 5 à 6000 man zouden vereischt worden". The States-General emphasised that the defence of the Cape was critical, and as a potential attack would come from the sea, it was "van de uiterste noodzaaklykheid is, kragtdaadige Maatregelen te neemen voor de zeekerheid van Cabo de Goede Hoop, waartoe de Neederlandsche Oost Indische Compagnie ... volstrek buiten Staat is ...". Nevertheless, they were certain that a naval force was the best way to secure the Cape: "... teegen eenen Vyandelyken aanval te dekken".¹²⁷

Despite the emphasis the States-General placed on the value of the Cape, their appreciation of its defencelessness and the fact that a naval squadron was seen as the best way to defend it, they did not have the ability to provide the force necessary. The VOC was also not in a position to place the defence of the Cape on a secure footing as Thibault stated, the "spirit of economy which motivates the representatives of the Company does not permit them to

¹²⁵ T.R.H. Davenport, *South Africa : A Modern History*, p.40.

¹²⁶ H. Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners*, pp.52-3; and T.D. Potgieter, *The First British Occupation*, p.16.

allocate the necessary monies to put the place in a state of defence required by the circumstances".¹²⁸ At this stage though, it was not even a spirit of "spirit of economy" anymore, but bankruptcy! The defence of the Cape against one of the powerful maritime empires was therefore in the hands of a bankrupt VOC and the small divided local population at the Cape.

After news of the war arrived at the end of April 1793, the Council of Policy and the Commissioners-General considered the threat to the Cape as serious and it was a matter of the highest urgency to bring the Colony in a good state of defence. Immediate measures were taken as it was feared that an enemy might arrive at any day. Recruitment for a Khoi unit quickly commenced and the *Corps Pennisten* was remobilised.¹²⁹ Several proclamations on defence matters followed and the burghers were reminded that they had to be prepared to pay the price for the defence of their homeland. The militia were warned that they had to respond immediately to call-up signals, keep horses and equipment ready, while those that do not react to the call-up could be severely punished. Signallers were ordered to stay vigilant and keep on firing until their signal was detected and the next station responded.¹³⁰

All retired VOC officials living around Cape Town were ordered to report at the Castle on 6 May and were told that they might be taken into service again as there was not enough men to serve all the guns on the various fortifications. The Cape burghers also had to provide the authorities with a list of able-bodied slaves and servants that could assist with handling the guns. They had to be available once a week for training and in case of an attack, owners had to allow them to proceed to their positions. As a considerable number of wagons, carts and horses might be required for the defence, an inventory of these items was compiled and burghers were told that they might be forced to provide transport to assist with moving guns, ammunition and equipment necessary in the case of an enemy attack. All serving men, servants and slaves had to be available with a ballast basket and a spade for erecting redoubts, trenches and field fortifications if necessary.¹³¹

The Council of Policy knew that the defensive capability of the Cape was wholly inadequate. At a meeting on 8 April 1793 Gordon emphasised that he had often complained about the inadequacies without effect: "meermaalen zyne bedenkelijkheid heft geoppert over de zwakke staat van 't Guarnisoen alhier en vooral over de onvoltalligheid van het *Nationaal*

¹²⁷ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Extract uit het Register der Resolutiën van de Hoog Mogende Heeren Staaten Generaal der Vereenigde Nederlande, 7/3/1793, pp.5-6.

¹²⁸ Quoted in H. R. de Puyfontaine, H., *Louis Michel Thibault, 1750-1815*, p.2.

¹²⁹ CA C671, Nederburgh en Frijkenius – Governor and Council of Policy, No 190, 6/5/1793, pp.6-7.

¹³⁰ *Kaapse Plakkaatboek*, IV, 30/4/1793 and 3/5/1793, pp.199-202.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

Battallion en Arthillerie Corps¹³² Both the National Battalion and the Artillery Corps were understaffed: 198 and 142 men short of the respective strengths of 600 and 400 that the *Heeren XVII* approved in 1790. As it was important to enhance the competence of the militia living in and around Cape Town, a general revue was scheduled for 8 July. To the annoyance (“grootste verontwaardiging”) of the authorities many of the militiamen did not turn up at their predetermined positions. The authorities warned that it was unacceptable, only very serious excuses would be accepted in future and those that do not turn up, would be charged and punished.¹³³ By comparison it was much different to the situation in 1781, which was indicative of the growing apathy towards VOC authority.

Military forces usually mirror the societies they come from. As a result the tension in Dutch society was also present in its military forces and within the military establishment at the Cape. Much of this tension was, however, also typical to military establishments of the day and had to do with the differences between the technical corps (such as engineering and artillery) and the more traditional corps (infantry and cavalry). Officers usually came from the upper classes, while in the more technical branches progressively more middle class officers served during the eighteenth century. Obviously, in the case of the VOC it was even more complex due to the economic decline of the VOC and the Dutch Republic, the tension between the *Patriotten* and the Orange supporters and the fear for military conflict, specifically with Britain.¹³⁴ At the Cape officers like Gordon and De Lille were ardent Orange supporters, while artillery and engineering officers, like Marnitz and Thibault, were not. These differences were to cause problems in defending the Cape against the British.

As he was the highest politico-military authority at the Cape, defence ultimately rested in Sluysken's hands.¹³⁵ After he took over the reigns of government, he focussed on checking a French assault. The French surveyed the Cape during the previous war and had good maps, while they were also well aware of the disposition of its defences. Consequently the Cape authorities were anxious about a possible attack from Mauritius, specifically as their intelligence indicated that a large number of warships, privateers and at least 4000 men were on the island, while they were apparently awaiting reinforcements (another 6000 men and warships). The Council of Policy thought that no attack had taken place because the French did not have

¹³² C215, Resolutiën, 8/4/1793, pp.144-203, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹³³ *Kaapse Plakkaatboek*, IV, 28/6/1793, 11/7/1793 and 13/7/1793, p.205.

¹³⁴ K. Zandvliet, ‘Vestingbouw in de Oost’ in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost Indische Compagnie*, p.155.

¹³⁵ CA C670, Nederburgh and Frijkenius – Council of Policy, 3/4/1793, pp.51-3.

sufficient capability, but if they received reinforcements their lack of provisions (which they required from the Cape in the past), might induce them to attack.¹³⁶

Since he was in the dark about the true state of affairs in the Netherlands, Sluysken shared his deep concern about the war with the Council of Policy on 27 February 1795 and stated that as much as possible must be done to defend the Cape. The following decisions were made: 1815kg (4000lbs) gunpowder had to be added to the 1815kg already in the magazine at Stellenbosch to improve the emergency storage capacity, while the powder magazine in False Bay had to be well stocked with gunpowder to supply ships and batteries and to ensure that they do not have a shortage in case of an attack. The burghers of Stellenbosch and Drakenstein had to provide wagons to transport the gunpowder and provide a burgher militia escort for it. The burgher militia and the VOC officials must be warned again, to prepare themselves for military duty and keep their equipment ready. A company of burgher dragoons must be called up to do piquet duty in Table Bay between 15 March and 15 May. In addition to the 15880kg (35000lbs) biscuit and 4 540kg (10000lbs) salted meat already stored in the Castle; brandy, vinegar and firewood also had to be stockpiled.¹³⁷ *Equipagemeester* J.A. Voltelen and two Captains had to survey Hout Bay to establish how many ships could anchor under the protection of its batteries. Finally, as ships had to anchor in False Bay during the winter, a detachment of 100 infantrymen, 50 artillerists and officers were dispatched to False Bay on 22 April 1795.¹³⁸

6.1. Garrison and Regular Troops

The General opinion amongst Dutch observers during the last years of the VOC was that the regular force at the Cape was too small and that it should be somewhere between 4000 and 6000 men. The States-General put it at 5000 to 6000 men, while De Jong thought it should consist of at least 4000 regular soldiers.¹³⁹ De Jong was shocked by the fact that there was roughly one regular artillerist per gun! Though the *Heeren XVII* stipulated in 1790 that the Garrison should consist of 600 infantrymen and 400 artillerists, it had only 450 infantrymen and 280 artillerists by February 1793. Nederburgh and Frijkenius refused to allow the Cape

¹³⁶ C231, Resolutiën (Secreet), 11/5/1795, pp.120-29, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹³⁷ C231, Resolutiën (Secreet), 27/2/1795, pp.86-90, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹³⁸ C230, Resolutiën, 16/4/1795, pp.2-6, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹³⁹ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, I, pp.110-2.

authorities to lift more soldiers from ships en route to Batavia to make up for the shortfall and stated that its strength should remain at that level.¹⁴⁰ The depots of the Meuron and Württemberg regiments were maintained at the Cape and had about 400 men, at most.¹⁴¹ Yet, by 1795 the number of new recruits that passed through the Cape had dwindled significantly.¹⁴²

After news of war arrived, military preparations for the defence of the Cape commenced. All working passes of soldiers were recalled and the VOC paid an additional so-called “serviesgeld” (f5 per month) to the soldiers.¹⁴³ The Commissioners-General also temporary allowed for some soldiers to be taken from ships to strengthen the Cape garrison on the provision that it should not leave Batavia defenceless, and by 1794 the strength of the *Nationaal Bataillon* had increased to about 592 infantrymen.¹⁴⁴ The infantry trained regularly, while weekly gunnery exercises for the artillery and the VOC officials were held to bolster the defensive readiness.¹⁴⁵

An old gripe Gordon had that was never solved; was the muskets issue. After the war broke out, he again complained that they did not have enough quality muskets at the Cape to equip everybody coming of age and joining the militia. They could only get more muskets from the Netherlands and Gordon again determined the quantity and model required. The Council of Policy requested the *Heeren XVII* to despatch muskets as a matter of urgency for the proper defence of the colony.¹⁴⁶

Organisationally Gordon was the *Hoofd der Militie* and the whole military establishment was under his command. The Commissioners-General had much praise for his abilities, defined his command authority and clearly stated that he was subordinate to the Governor for executing the defence responsibility.¹⁴⁷ The infantry or *Nationaal Bataillon* was under the command of Major C.M.W. De Lille (who was an acting Lieutenant-Colonel from December 1793 onwards without an increase in pay due to the financial difficulties).¹⁴⁸ By January 1794 Major J. Fischer of the artillery was very ill and as he was over seventy years of age, he had to be replaced by a younger officer capable as artillerist and engineer. The senior artillery officer, Captain G.C. Kuchler, was promoted to Major and appointed.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁰ CA C670, Nederburgh and Frijkenius, – Council of Policy, No 187, 22/4/1793, pp.136-7.

¹⁴¹ H.C.V. Leibbrandt and J.E. Heeres, *Memorien van den Gouverneur Van de Graaff*, pp.25-6.

¹⁴² C225, Resolutiën, 11/8/1794, pp.82-137, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁴³ CA C671, Nederburgh en Frijkenius – Governor and Council of Policy, No 190, 6/5/1793, pp.6-7.

¹⁴⁴ A.J. Boeseken, *Die Nederlandse Kommissaris*, pp.242-43.

¹⁴⁵ C218, Resolutiën, 21/9/1793, pp.176-270, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁴⁶ C222, Resolutiën, 4/3/1794, pp.200-48, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁴⁷ CA C213, Resolutiën, 26/2/1793, pp.280-82; and C215, Resolutiën, 2/4/1795, pp.62-3.

¹⁴⁸ A.J. Boeseken, *Die Nederlandse Kommissaris*, pp.107-8.

¹⁴⁹ C228, Resolutiën, 30/1/1794, pp.186-215, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

The infantry battalion however was everything but “national” as it consisted of soldiers from most countries in the north of Europe with few Dutchmen in its ranks. The officers were staunch supporters of the House of Orange, while the rank-and-file of the day generally served the purse that paid best. The Artillery Corps was a bit better off than the infantry as the men were mostly a mixture of Dutch, German and French. Most of its members supported the *Patriotten* and probably preferred to align themselves with the French, rather than the British. Military establishments underwent drastic change after the French Revolution, as the age of limited war was over and from it national mass armies arose that replaced the small professional mercenary armies of the eighteenth century.¹⁵⁰ However, this did not have an effect on the Cape, as the VOC military establishment was archetypical of the mercenary military systems of the eighteenth century.

So, who were available to defend the Cape by June 1795? The Garrison that had to face an invader was a depleted force. No foreign regiment was present as the Württemberg Regiment had left for Batavia years earlier. The regular soldiers were somewhat reinforced after 1793 and was close to the strengths suggested by the *Heeren XVII* in 1790. The *Nationaal Bataillon* had 25 officers and 546 infantrymen and the Artillery Corps had 27 officers and 403 artillerymen. In addition, a *Corps Pandoeren* of about 200 strong existed, the depots of the Meuron and Württemberg Regiments had 57 infantrymen and 44 *sipahis* (referred to *sipayers* or Malays in the Cape documents) or Asian soldiers in the service of the VOC, were present at the Cape. The *sipahis* had arrived with the Dutch ship *Alblasserdam* and Marnitz referred to them as half a company of Malays. The full time soldiers (officers and men) therefore amounted to roughly 1302 officers and men.¹⁵¹ This was not at all sufficient, as common wisdom at the time suggested that about 5000 troops were necessary to successfully defend the Cape against a European attacker. To supplement the regular forces there were the militia that consisted of infantry, cavalry and artillery, old soldiers at the Cape, VOC officials, seamen, artisans as well as labourers in service of the VOC. However, due to security problems in the interior, many of the militia would not react to a call-up, which implied that in total the defenders did not amount to much more than 3600 men.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ G. Parker, *The Military Revolution*, pp.151-3.

¹⁵¹ The strengths are mainly based on information in the documents compiled P.W. Marnitz and H.D. Campagne: CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de Overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop aan de Engelshen door Een Vriend der Waarheid Aldaar*, pp.33-5; and VC76, H.D. Campagne, *Memorie en Bijzonderheden wegens Overgave der Kaap de Goede Hoop 1795*, p.2. See also H.F. Nel, *Die Britse Verowering van die Kaap in 1795*, pp.23-5.

6.2. The Corps Pandoeren

After the outbreak of war, the Commissioners-General and the Council of Policy realised that one of the ways to immediately strengthen the garrison was to raise a local Khoi unit. This went hand-in-hand with VOC policy of raising indigenous forces to bolster defence, specifically in times of crises. It was also cheaper than bringing in more expensive European soldiers. On 30 April 1793 the Council of Policy decided to start recruitment by publishing a *Placcaat* calling up all proficient (“bekwame”) Khoi and Khoi of mixed blood and requesting all burghers in the Cape, Stellenbosch, Drakenstein and Swellendam areas to send men in their service capable of handling a musket to the Cape for military service. They also had to provide them with a firearm if possible, which the VOC would replace.¹⁵³ This proclamation was very similar to the one of 1781.

On 3 May 1793 Rhenius requested Landdrost H.C.D. Maynier in Graaff-Reinet to send recruits, but Maynier answered that due to local security problems they could spare no recruits. At this stage they feared a Xhosa onslaught and a number of commandos were mobilised to participate in the frontier conflict. However, the mission station at Baviaanskloof (later Genadendal) was obliged to supply recruits and they would do the same again in March 1794.¹⁵⁴ Within a few months (by 3 August) the Corps was already 134 strong.¹⁵⁵

The new unit, consisting of the “natuurlijke inwoonderen van dit land”, was called the “Corps Pandoeren”. The term “Pandoeren” or “Pandouren” had its origin in the Serb-Croat word “pàndûr” or from the Hungarian “pandúr”, which apparently applied to an armed servant of the state. The soldiers of an armed unit created in 1741 by Baron Trenck in Croatia were referred to as “pàndûrs” and they had a fierce reputation as agile infantry and for their brutish character on the battlefield. In the Netherlands common soldiers were often referred to as “pandoeren” in jest, but it is not known how it became the name of the Khoi unit.¹⁵⁶

The VOC had to provide weapons, clothing, food and accommodation to the *pandoers*. Their uniforms were relatively simple and consisted of leather jackets and trousers, black linen shirts and round leather caps, which was durable clothing that lasted well. Shoes were not mentioned and they probably made their own leather shoes (velskoene) as was the case during

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ CA C671, Nederburgh en Frijkenius – Governor and Council of Policy, No 190, 6/5/1793, pp.6-7; and *Kaapse Plakkaatboek*, IV, 30/4/1793 and 2/5/1793, p.198.

¹⁵⁴ J. de Villiers, *Hottentot-Regimente aan die Kaap*, pp.19-22.

¹⁵⁵ CA C714, Verslag en Bijlagen van Nederburgh en Frijkenius, Naamlijst van het Corps Pandoeren, 3/8/1793, No 22, pp.100-5.

the First British Occupation. The corps also had their own colours (flag) and a military band consisting of drums and wind instruments. Some brought their own weapons and in general the *pandoers* were considered to be good marksmen. As the Garrison had a shortage of muskets, old muskets were also purchased and repaired in the VOC armoury. They were not issued with bayonets, which were regarded as a hassle to their shorter build. Apparently some of the members of the unit (perhaps the NCO's) were equipped with sabres, while a number of blunderbusses for firing grapeshot were also issued to the unit.¹⁵⁷

The *Corps Pandoeren* was much smaller than the *Corps Bastaard Hottentotten* (135 after three months in comparison with 400), which could be ascribed to the financial plight at the Cape, the apathy amongst many burghers towards the VOC and the fact that they were unwilling to release people in their service to do military service for a long time. The smaller unit had more time to train and they had a temporary camp – probably at Rietvlei. It seems that the first commander was Jan Fürstenberg, but by 1795 the commander was a burgher militia officer Jan Cloete.¹⁵⁸

By June 1795 the *Corps Pandoeren* was fully integrated into the Cape defensive system. They regularly trained and participated in military parades. In terms of their size, opinions differ. According to Sluysken they mustered about 138, Campagne and Marnitz both put it at around 200, while some historians put it at 210. Generally the Marnitz view is accepted. His account is in general quite accurate and he was an artillery officer that served in the firing line during the British attempt on the Cape.¹⁵⁹

6.3. The Cape Militia

After news of the war arrived at the Cape, the “Corps der Pennisten” was remobilised on the insistence of Nederburgh and Frijkenius. Van Rheede van Oudtshoorn was appointed as Commandant of the *Pennisten Corps* with the rank of Captain. The Corps consisted of two companies, members of the Council of Policy were their officers and they held their own

¹⁵⁶ J. de Villiers, *Hottentot-Regimente aan die Kaap*, pp.22-3.

¹⁵⁷ CA C2745, Specificatie Boek betreffende Ontvangst en Uitgaaf, June 1795, Tabel 2, Wapenkamer, pp.27-8; and J. de Villiers, *Hottentot-Regimente aan die Kaap*, pp.28-30.

¹⁵⁸ CA C714, Verslag en Bijlagen van Nederburgh en Frijkenius, Naamlijst van het Corps Pandoeren, 3/8/1793, No 22, pp.100-5.

¹⁵⁹ See A.J. Sluysken, *Verbaal gehouden by den Commissaris van de Caap De Goede Hoop...*, p.61; CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, Verhaal van de Overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop, pp.33-5.

krijgsraad six times a year to discuss the domestic organisation of the corps.¹⁶⁰ By August 1792 the *Pennisten Corps* was 175 strong.¹⁶¹ Nederburgh spoke to the *Pennisten Corps* on 5 July 1793, he complemented them on their appearance, and stated that he and Frijkenius were very impressed with the enthusiastic way in which they quickly took up their military responsibilities.¹⁶²

Much care was taken to keep the militia properly manned and well-lead, with the result that regular appointments and promotions of officers and NCO's in the Cape Town militia and in the militia of the districts often took place.¹⁶³ De Jong was very impressed by the fact that the militia diligently attended regular military exercises. The martial skills and marksmanship of the Cape burghers amazed him: "Kapenaars ... dat zij over het algemeen de beste schutters zijn, die men ergens vinden zal ...".¹⁶⁴ He recorded that the burgher cavalry were fast and efficient in using their weapons and provided much detail: "Wanneer zij willen, is hunne geswindheid in het laden verbazend; zij hebben het los kruid in de zak en kogels in den mond. Door de gewoonte weten zij in eene greep eene lading te vatten, doen kruid in de loop, vullen onderwijl door een stamp de pan, laten zonder prop 'er kogel uit den mond oploopen, smuiten 'er weer eenige korrels kruid op, die den kogel vast doen zitten, en schieten". They were also quick to mount their horses and good at firing from the saddle, either aiming from the left or right side: "... die zelfs behendig op het zadel springen, en 'er boven op staande hun gewis schot geven, terwijl het hunt evens onteven is, aan welke zijde van het paard het wild opspringt, leggende links en rechts aan en vuur gevende zoo wel aan de eene als aan de andery zijde".¹⁶⁵ These skills were very effective for hunting and brought success in wars against indigenous enemies, however, it would not be the same against a resolute and professional European enemy. Wars of the period showed that undisciplined, or militia, forces did not stand against regular forces in conventional combat. The militia and the *pandoers* (which De Jong regarded as good infantry) would be very effective as skirmishers, they could hinder an enemy's advance, but they needed good leadership knowledgeable in the practices of war, to really be the formidable force the Cape required.

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- ¹⁶⁰ C225, Resolutiën, 24/7/1794, pp.17-53, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005); and CA C671, Nederburgh en Frijkenius – Governor and Council of Policy, No 190, 6/5/1793, pp.6-7.
- ¹⁶¹ CA C714, Verslag en Bijlagen van Nederburgh en Frijkenius, Revu Lijst van het Corps Pennisten, 29/8/1793, No 21, pp.92-6.
- ¹⁶² A.J. Boeseken, *Die Nederlandse Kommissaris*, p.107.
- ¹⁶³ C225, Resolutiën, 24/7/1794, pp.17-53, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).
- ¹⁶⁴ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, I, p.33.
- ¹⁶⁵ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, I, pp.113-4.

In March 1795 a burgher dragoon company from Stellenbosch was called up to do piquet duty at the Cape and patrol the beaches around Table Bay. They served to 15 May, as it was thought that an enemy would not enter Table Bay in the winter months.¹⁶⁶ From the calculations Marnitz made and the information in Nel, the mounted militia of the Cape, Stellenbosch and Swellendam totalled about 1000 dragoons. An additional 400-600 militia, which included members of the Cape militia infantry, militia gunners, the *Pennisten Corps* and officials of the VOC, were seconded to the artillery. Marnitz calculated (probably a bit inflated) that with the inclusion of the militia, the Cape defenders totalled 3631 men by June 1795.¹⁶⁷

6.4. Fortifications and Gunnery

Nederburgh and Frijkenius concurred that important work on the fortifications had to continue. By December 1792 Major Fischer investigated the artillery on the various batteries, while Thibault had to reconstruct two of the batteries in the Sea Lines, the *Elizabeth* and *Charlotte*, that were severely damaged in the winter storms. He also had to complete the extended gun-platforms at the *Chavonnes Battery*, complete the improvements of its flanks and create another oven for red-hot-shot. This work was very urgent and more artisans were posted to assist with it.¹⁶⁸ Thibault and Gordon also conducted an inspection of Paarden Island to investigate the creation of a new battery, but due to the financial difficulties nothing came of it.¹⁶⁹

In April 1793 Gordon argued that the decaying *Nieuwe Battery* had to be renovated as Van de Graaff removed its guns without his consent. It was possible for an enemy to land on the shallow beach in front of it, out of range of the other batteries, attack the right wing of the Cape defences and if successful in this undertaking, they would be able to attack the city. If the battery was operational, it would force an enemy to land on the other side of the Salt River mouth and Gordon stressed that to the French this battery was important because the shallow water and the swell made it difficult for ships to bombard it. Armed with four to six heavy guns, it would pose a great danger for boats attempting amphibious landings.¹⁷⁰ In the end the battery was armed with four 18-pounders.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ G.M. Theal, *History of Africa South of the Zambesi*, III, p.307.

¹⁶⁷ CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de Oorgave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, pp.33-35; and H.F. Nel, *Die Britse verowering van die Kaap in 1795*, p.25.

¹⁶⁸ C209, Resolutiën, 11/12/1792, pp.97-133, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁶⁹ H.R. de Puyfontaine, *Louis Michel Thibault*, pp.4-6.

¹⁷⁰ C215, Resolutiën, 2/4/1793, pp.46-143, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁷¹ CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de Oorgave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, pp.35-6.

Sluysken was concerned about the defensive readiness of the Cape. He ordered some of the batteries and fortifications in disrepair to be renovated, while new batteries were erected in Table Bay, Simon's Bay and in Hout Bay. He also ordered the military engineers, Thibault and Barbier, to resume their renovation and improvement work and ensure that the batteries in Table Bay, Kamptz Bay and Hout Bay had ovens for producing red-hot-shot.¹⁷² Thibault complained to the Council of Policy in September 1793 that the work did not progress sufficiently as he had only four fortification workers. Another 26 workers (including 20 slaves) were then detached to assist with the essential work on the fortifications.¹⁷³ A lack of money made things very difficult and by December 1793 the work on the *Elizabeth Battery*, the improvement of the powder magazine and the work on the *Chavonnes Battery* ceased because it exceeded the anticipated amount with f3282.¹⁷⁴

Improvements to the fortifications continued during 1794 and 1795. The only new battery Sluysken gave Gordon permission to create in Table Bay was the *Kijk in die Pot Battery*, beyond Gallows Hill, to the south of the *Mouille Battery*. It was armed with four 24-pounders.¹⁷⁵ One of Gordon's unique innovations was to heighten the breastworks of the *Mouille Battery* with cowhides filled with wool. Marnitz was critical of it, as the cost of the hides was f2000 while if they were to cut sods in the rainy season, it would only amount to f300. Apparently the stench was also enough to drive an enemy back – only the stray dogs of the Cape took quite a liking to it.¹⁷⁶

The right flank of the *Chavonnes Battery* was substantially elongated and improved upon according to Van de Graaff's plans and by 1795 the renovated battery was a formidable fortification with 38 guns, of which twelve were 36-pounders.¹⁷⁷ De Jong considered the *Amsterdam Battery* as the most important battery of the Cape specifically as it was capable of firing red-hot-shot and its arc of fire covered the whole anchorage.¹⁷⁸ A map of Cape Town, Table Mountain and the immediate area, drawn by Thibault in 1793 showed the progressing work on the new line above the Castle as part of it was executed.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷² C.J. Barnard, Robert Jacob Gordon se Loopbaan aan die Kaap, p.404.

¹⁷³ C218, Resolutiën, 4/9/1793, pp.32-86, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁷⁴ See the correspondence about the fortifications and the costs involved in CA C1861 and C1862, Brieven en Papieren van A.J. Sluysken, November and December 1793; and A.J. Boeseken, *Die Nederlandse Kommissaris*, pp.107-8.

¹⁷⁵ CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, Verhaal van de Oorgave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop, pp.35-6.

¹⁷⁶ P.W. Marnitz, *The Dutch Surrender of the Cape of Good Hope*, 1795, p.67.

¹⁷⁷ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, I, p.112; and P.W. Marnitz, *The Dutch Surrender of the Cape of Good Hope*, 1795, p.12.

¹⁷⁸ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, I, p.111.

¹⁷⁹ CA M1/3563, L.M. Thibault, Plan de la Ville du Cap ..., 1793.

Military observers like De Jong and Vaillant reported that the artillery at the Cape was proficient in using red-hot-shot or glowing rounds ("gloeijende kogels"), and De Jong had much praise for Gordon's efforts to improve the gunnery at the Cape.¹⁸⁰ The danger of red-hot-shot was that it easily caused fires on a wooden ship with much pick, tar, gunpowder, paint, ropes, canvas and dry wood around, as the British had showed when they defeated a Spanish attack on Gibraltar. Artillerists were uneasy about loading glowing rounds as it might burn through to the powder and ignite it at random; which would be very dangerous to those serving the guns. The traditional way of using it would be to load a sheepskin plug with its hair on the outside and with some pieces of skin in the inside, a piece of wood (two inches thick) with an iron plate and springs nailed onto it, between the glowing round and the gunpowder. Two men would then carry the glowing round in an iron ring, load it into the gun barrel and the gun was fired as quickly as possible.¹⁸¹

Gordon changed all that. He thought that the process was unnecessary cumbersome and ineffective, as the gunners were afraid that the powder would explode when loading the guns, while they fired the guns with too much haste and without aiming properly. He also wanted to establish if it was really so dangerous to use red-hot shot as everybody thought, how long it would take for a red-hot round to ignite the powder in the barrel of a gun, or if such a round in a barrel could cause it to burst? It was very important to have certainty about these issues when you planned to use it during a war.¹⁸² He conducted six experiments in September 1793 to illustrate that the cumbersome method was unnecessary and that, with some differences, red-hot shot could be handled in basically the same way as normal shot. He proved that a glowing round placed between the normal rope-plugs could not cause the gunpowder to explode. He loaded glowing rounds into a gun with only a rope plug and would then sit on the barrel of the gun. At times smoke came out of the barrel, but the plugs rarely burned deeper than an inch and it also did not ignite as there was not enough oxygen in the propped-up gun barrel.¹⁸³

In a report Gordon wrote to the Council of Policy and the Commissioners-General, dated 21 September 1793, he explained that he developed a new way of using red-hot-shot and that his method could be implemented without danger. The most important implication was that the expensive wooden plugs were unnecessary and red-hot shot could be used by the coastal artillery, without all the previous fuss, in more-or-less the same way as cold rounds. This

¹⁸⁰ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, II, p.84.

¹⁸¹ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, II, p.90.

¹⁸² CA C218, Resolutiën, 21/9/1793, pp.246-8.

improved the defensive potential of the Cape against enemy warships. He explained that “bij deze proeven ben ik overtuigd geworden, dat de Kaap van den zee kant door schepen niet genomen kan worden ... en dat men nooit met een kouden kogel naar een schip moet schieten. Volgt de ontvlaming van een, in weer en wind ... wat zal het dan niet wezen, als zelfs maar een gloeiende kogel een zoo brandbaar ligchaam, als een schip is, komt?”¹⁸⁴ Gordon emphasised that normal “cold” rounds must not be used against shipping since 84 cold rounds hit Captain Fuglede’s ship in 1783 and though some of the rounds penetrated the hull of the ship, nobody was injured and the ship was not put out of action. Therefore too many “cold rounds” would be necessary against a fleet. The Council of Policy thanked Gordon for his excellent work with streamlining the process of firing red-hot-shot and praised his “ywer, beleid en kunde”.¹⁸⁵

Gordon also thought that red-hot-shot might be used onboard warships. However, this would be very dangerous as the risk of fire on a ship would just be too great – one of the first things done when a warship cleared for action was to put out the galley fire. Understandably, Vaillant was not enthusiastic about the idea and stated when it happened, “...dan blijf ik thuis!”¹⁸⁶

In 1793 Gordon thought that as French privateers could capture Robben Island and threaten ships in the bay, it had to be protected with four 24-pounders in two batteries, 32 artillerymen and some seamen. Both De Jong and Thibault considered Gordon’s plan with disdain and though the island could only be temporarily used by privateers as it did not have a secure anchorage that a number of ships could use for a time. Furthermore, four guns would in any case not be enough to protect it against an assault by warships.¹⁸⁷ Thibault wrote afterwards that he apparently begged the Governor not to force him to “collaborate further ... in errors for which he will not hesitate to blame me entirely”.¹⁸⁸ The big guns were never placed on Robben Island and by March 1794 it had fourteen 6-pounders in two small batteries.¹⁸⁹

In False Bay the defences were lacking, which was inconceivable because of the value of Simon’s Bay as an anchorage. Sluysken realised the seriousness of this omission and ordered Thibault to erect two small batteries in Simon’s Bay. Guns were dispatched from the

¹⁸³ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, II, pp.84-5.

¹⁸⁴ The report Gordon submitted to Council of Policy on 21 September 1793 is in CA C218, Resolusiën, 21/9/1793, pp.244-69; and it is copied and discussed in C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, II, pp.87-91.

¹⁸⁵ CA C218, Resolusiën, 21/9/1793, pp.262-3.

¹⁸⁶ S. Dörr, *De Kundige Kapitein*, Vaillant – Van der Hoop, 1/7/1789, p.177.

¹⁸⁷ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, II, p.62.

¹⁸⁸ Quoted in H. R. de Puyfontaine, H., *Louis Michel Thibault, 1750-1815*, p.6.

Cape in June 1793, while the post had to return the 20 3-pounders and 4-pounders it had. As the batteries were erected mainly by convict and slave labour, it was not at all expensive. Gordon named the battery at the south side of the bay the *Boetselaar*, while the *Zoutman Battery* was to the north of the anchorage. These batteries were completed in March 1794, and by the following month, when the two guardhouses were completed they received a crew of one officer, one NCO and 13 gunners. The VOC personnel at the outpost were also trained to assist the gunners in an emergency.¹⁹⁰ These batteries had ovens for red-hot-shot, they were armed with eight 24-pounders and some 8-pounders and covered the passage between Roman Rock and the Ark with crossfire. Their purpose was to protect the anchorage and the road to Cape Town, yet they were not regarded as very effective and Thibault was also critical of them because they were created too economically.¹⁹¹ In De Jong's estimation it only protected Simon's Bay against an attack by privateers and though the bay was probably safer than before, it still did not have sufficient protection against an assault by eight or ten warships (often the size of a naval squadron) who would easily silence the batteries, while the batteries also provided no protection against an enemy that could fire at the anchored ships from the calm water of the bay.¹⁹²

During 1793 Thibault improved the defences of Hout Bay and the gun emplacement against the mountain at Hout Bay (*East Fort*) with the assistance of convicts, slaves and soldiers.¹⁹³ The *East Fort* (renamed *Sluysken*) and *West Fort* (renamed *Gordon*) were each armed with five 18-pounders and both had ovens for red-hot-shot. By January 1794 another gun position, the so-called *Klein Gibraltar*, was added to the north of the *East Fort* to cover the landing beach. It was not armed as guns were supposed to be taken from ships.¹⁹⁴ De Jong was impressed by the fortifications of Hout Bay as the bay was a natural position that could easily be defended and the three batteries added to its security. On the negative side, Hout Bay provided insufficient protection against the south-easter that blew right into the bay and made it very difficult, and dangerous, for sailing ships to leave against the wind as they could be blown onto the beach. Only the small north-westerly cove was really protected and seven to eight heavy VOC ships plus two or three ships of shallower draft, could anchor there.¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁹ C. de Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, II, pp.62-3.

¹⁹⁰ CA C222, Resolutiën, 4/3/1794, p.209; C222, Resolutiën, 21/3/1794, p.370; and C223, Resolutiën, 30/4/1794, pp.149-50.

¹⁹¹ H. R. de Puyfontaine, H., *Louis Michel Thibault, 1750-1815*, p.6.

¹⁹² C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, II, pp.73-4.

¹⁹³ U. Seeman, *Fortifications of the Cape Peninsula, 1647-1829*, p.86.

¹⁹⁴ D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, p.272; and U. Seeman, *Fortifications of the Cape Peninsula*, pp.86-8.

¹⁹⁵ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, II, pp.74-6.

Table 8: Armament on some of the most important batteries and fortifications by 1795 ¹⁹⁶			
Name	Description and Location	Armament calibre and number	
Castle and outworks	Five pointed star and Citadel with envelopes, ravelins and redans	18-pounders 12-pounders 8-pounders 6-pounders 4-pounder 30cm mortars	14 5 53 6 10 12
<i>Couvre face Imhoff</i>	"Couvre face" on the sea facing side of the Castle	24-pounders 18-pounders 12-pounders 8-pounders	6 11 4 8
Sea Lines	Stretched from the <i>Imhoff</i> towards the Salt River to <i>Fort Knokke</i> . It was of earth and stonework and included the <i>Elizabeth</i> , <i>Helena</i> , <i>Charlotte</i> , <i>Tulbagh</i> and <i>Riebeeck</i> batteries	36-pounders 24-pounders 18-pounders 12-pounders 8-pounders	6 6 5 8 4
<i>Fort Knokke</i>	Four-pointed star at the end of the Sea Lines of masonry and earthwork construction	24-pounders 18-pounders 12-pounders 8-pounders 18cm howitzers	2 5 6 6 2
<i>Intermediare Battery</i>	Earthwork fortification close to the Salt River mouth	18-pounders	4
<i>Chavonnes Battery</i>	Masonry battery at the entrance to Table Bay at the foot of Signal Hill	36-pounders 18-pounders 12-pounders 8-pounders	12 10 12 4
<i>Amsterdam Battery</i>	Large masonry casement battery located to the west of the Castle	24-pounders 18-pounders 8-pounders	24 10 4
<i>Mouille Battery</i>	Barbette battery at Mouille Point	36-pounders 18-pounders	4 2
<i>Roggebaay Battery</i>	Two barbette batteries, the <i>Hooge</i> and <i>Laage</i> , in Roggebaay	18-pounders 12-pounders 8-pounders	4 6 4
Simon's Bay	The <i>Boetselaar Battery</i> was south and <i>Zoutman Battery</i> north of the anchorage	24-pounders 8-pounders	8 4
Other defences	Some fixed defences were still under construction, while others were retrenchments, redoubts and barbette batteries in Table Bay, Hout Bay and Kamptz Bay. In Table Bay it included the French Lines, <i>Kijk in die Pot</i> , <i>Kleine Mouille</i> at Three Anchor Bay, work in progress on the new lines above the Castle and retrenchments at the powder magazines. The armament ranged from 24-pounders (<i>Kijk in die Pot</i>) to 4-pounders (on Kloofnek).		

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It is important to note that this is not a complete list, but only the most important fortifications in Table Bay and Simon's Bay. The detail was taken from CA VC117, Gordon, *Beredeneerde Memorie*, 1786, pp.18-27; CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de Oorgave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*; C714, Bijlagen, Guilquin and Thibault – Rhenius, 27/2/1792; C704, Bijlagen, *Generale Staat van Ammunition Goederen van Oorlog*, November 1792, pp.105-6.

By 1795, the defence of Cape Town rested on the Castle and 33 other forts or batteries in various conditions of repair and construction, from earthen ramparts to stone and masonry forts:¹⁹⁷ In the immediate area of Cape Town alone these included the Castle and its outworks, the *Chavonnes Battery*, the *Couvre face Imhoff*, the Sea Lines with its numerous batteries, *Fort Knokke*, the *Amsterdam Battery*, the entrenchment from *Fort Knokke* to the lower slopes of Devil's Peak known as the French Lines, the *Intermediare* and *Nieuwe Batteries*, the unfinished lines above the Castle known as the *Hollandse Linie*, the *Roggebaay Battery*, the *Mouille Battery*, the *Kijk in die Pot Battery* and the *Kleine Mouille Battery* (sometimes in error referred to as *Heine*). In Kamptz Bay an entrenchment and a battery were erected, Hout Bay had three batteries and Simon's Bay had two.¹⁹⁸ (See Table 8 for an indication of the armament on some of the most important batteries and fortifications.)

Although many of these fortifications were far from formidable or had a limited field of fire, as a whole the system of fortifications around Table Bay was definitely a major consideration for any would-be attacker. From Kamptz Bay to *Fort Knokke* nineteen ovens could produce 450 rounds of 36, 24, 18 and 12-pounder red-hot-shot in fourteen minutes, while around 400 artillery pieces were available for the defence of the peninsula.¹⁹⁹ Some of the artillery pieces were not properly mounted, while others were rusted or unusable. In De Jong's estimation the defence of the Cape of Good Hope was made much more effective by the efforts of Gordon ("in een zoo geducten staat gesteld") and with only 2500 good troops in defence a whole squadron would have difficulties in taking the Cape.²⁰⁰

6.5. Coastal Defence and the Signal System

When De Jong arrived in Simon's Bay in April 1792, he considered False Bay as the most probable place for an enemy attack on the Cape, because it was not possible to create batteries everywhere due to the variety of possible landing places: "...zo een vijand ooit een aanval op de Kaap doet, deze met een veel en mogelijk meerdere waarschijnlijkheid in Baai-Fals, dan elders landen zal ... zoo veel landing-plaatzen oplevert".²⁰¹ Its defensive strength was in the very poor road from Simon's Town to Muizenberg, with the steep mountain on the one side and the sea

¹⁹⁷ B. Johnson Barker, *The Castle of Good Hope*, p.47.

¹⁹⁸ CA C714, Bijlagen, Guilquin and Thibault - Rhenius, 27/2/1792, pp.69-75; and H.F. Nel, *Die Britse verowering van die Kaap*, pp.15-9.

¹⁹⁹ CA C704, Bijlagen, Generale Staat van Ammunitie Goederen van Oorlog, November 1792, pp.105-6.

²⁰⁰ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, II, p.84.

and rocky coastline on the other. This would make it very difficult for an enemy to advance if it was well defended and proper defences were erected along the road. Furthermore, it should also be defended by skirmishers, in which role the Khoi would do well; "... dat zij te voet, met geweer, zabel en patron-tas beladen, veel minder met veldstukken hier door zouden kunnen komen, mits men hen met beleid en dapperheid den doortogt wilde betwisten ... met kleine batterijen van drie en vier stukken te versterken en eenige Hottentotten in hinderlaag te leggen".²⁰²

After the outbreak of the war the defence of Simon's Bay was taken seriously. If an overwhelming enemy force arrived the VOC Resident (Post Holder) was ordered to destroy all supplies in the stores before leaving the post, while all burghers, with their animals, vehicles and food, had to withdraw into the interior. Burghers who disregard the order could receive the death penalty.²⁰³ As a result of the concern about the defence of Simon's Bay during winter, in May 1794 Sluysken ordered that the Simon's Bay garrison be strengthened with five officers, 13 NCO's 112 men (artillery as well as infantry). They had to be relieved on a monthly basis.²⁰⁴ If they were forced to withdraw from the Simon's Town, the artillery had to spike the guns on the fortifications.

Muizenberg had a retrenchment and a military post with one sergeant and a small number of soldiers by April 1792. Muizenberg, with its soft sand that held horses and wagons with difficulty, offered an ideal defensive position as it had the Sandvlei marshes on the one side and the high mountain face on the other.²⁰⁵ De Jong, in line with other military observers, saw it as the position that safeguarded the Cape. Incredibly though, the Military Commission did not place much emphasis on it – perhaps they focussed too much on the safeguarding of the main anchorages.

Nederburgh and Frijkenius were convinced of the strategic value Muizenberg had in the defence of the Cape. As a result they ordered the work on the stables that had burned down to be completed.²⁰⁶ After war broke out it was deemed necessary to keep a vigilant guard at various positions around the Cape Peninsula and a detachment burgher cavalry was posted to

²⁰¹ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, I, p.59.

²⁰² C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, I, pp.59-60.

²⁰³ CA C601, Inkomende Brieven, Brandt – Rhenius, 4/5/1793, pp.12-3 and 24/5/1793, p.35.

²⁰⁴ CA C223, Resolutiën, 19/5/1794, p.309.

²⁰⁵ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, I, pp.60-1.

²⁰⁶ D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, p.347.

Muizenberg in June and July 1794, while in April 1795 100 infantrymen and 50 artillerists were placed in False Bay.²⁰⁷

The VOC maintained a military post at Kamptz Bay due to its strategic value for the defence of the Cape. They had to control the surrounding area, monitor all landings and departures from the bay and also had to keep the vital road across Kloofnek impassable. The only building in the bay was the old farmhouse where the artillerists, manning the small fortification at the southern corner of the bay, stayed.²⁰⁸

After the departure of the Württemberg Regiment, the military post in St Helena Bay was reduced, but not closed. By July 1793 it consisted of a Sergeant and five men and in 1795, it had a Sergeant and four men.²⁰⁹ Saldanha Bay maintained its value to the Cape. Between 1750 and 1795 about nineteen ships had to go to Saldanha Bay to be repaired and thirteen ships put into Saldana Bay after experiencing some or other emergency at sea. When the VOC disbanded a number of their outposts in 1791, the Council of Policy decided that Saldanha Bay must not be disbanded as the Cape would perform its function of providing a service to ships with difficulty, without the bay. In addition to providing a service to shipping, the post had to do military observations and communicate VOC policy to both visitors and burghers living in the area.²¹⁰

The military post in Mossel Bay was of much value to the VOC, though there is no proof that the large number of troops (about 100) destined for it, was ever stationed there. Mossel Bay never had to deal with an aggressor from the sea, but it improved the local security and enhanced the security of the Cape as it provided the VOC with a military presence far from the Cape. Late in 1793 the Mossel Bay garrison participated in the so-called Second Frontier War (that broke out in May 1793). By February 1794 the Mossel Bay post consisted of a Post Holder (previously an Ensign), three soldiers, a caretaker of the VOC grain store and nine others, while it is uncertain if any soldiers were still posted at Plettenberg Bay.²¹¹

In June 1793 the signal system around the Cape peninsula was improved. A quartermaster and two soldiers were placed at Cape Point as lookouts, while two soldiers had to keep watch at de Westhoek (Slangkop).²¹² To replace the horse rider between Muizenberg and the Castle in the case of an enemy fleet arriving in Simon's Bay, a signal system with coloured

²⁰⁷ CA C230, Resolutiën, 16/4/1795, p.5.

²⁰⁸ D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, pp.286-7.

²⁰⁹ BO237, Military and Naval Lists, 23/9/1795, p.20.

²¹⁰ CA C1311, Memoriën en Rapporten, De Post aan de Saldanha Baay, 26/4/1791, pp.251-3.

²¹¹ D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, pp.437, 466, 613 and 620.

²¹² CA C601, Inkomende Brieven, Brandt – Rhenius, 4/5/1793, pp.12-3 and 24/5/1793, p.35.

flags, guns and signal fires were introduced. In case of an emergency the lookout on Vlagge Hoek in Simon's Bay had to fire the required shots from the *Boetselaer Battery*, the post at Muizenberg had to convey the message to Wynberg, from where it was relayed to the signal post on the slopes of Devil's Peak and then to the Castle. The VOC also appointed a lookout in Hout Bay, one Van Helsdingen (the owner of Kronendal) who immediately had to convey all important information by horse to the VOC post house at the former Conway redoubt, from where it would be relayed to Wynberg and then to the Cape.²¹³ In principle a lookout system provided early warning, yet the defensive system that had to deter or defeat an attacker was lacking.

7. DEFENCE OF SHIPPING AND NAVAL FORCES

The three Dutch naval squadrons that proceeded to the East during the 1780's provided much military support to the VOC. After the return of Staringh and after the outbreak of the war the Dutch Republic dispatched no more squadrons to the East, while warships despatched to the Cape and the Indies in the 1790's were mostly independent frigates on convoy duty.²¹⁴ By 1793 the Dutch naval establishment was in a poor state and only five ships of the line and 21 frigates in its fleet were fully operational.²¹⁵ When the Dutch frigate *Amazoon* (36), under the command of Captain Abraham Kuvel, and the brig *Komeet* (18), Lieutenant Claris, sailed from Texel on 18 February 1792 with Commissioners-General Nederburgh and Frijkenius onboard, they also escorted a VOC convoy. The ships arrived at the Cape on 18 June 1792 and by November 1793 the *Amazoon* was in Batavia with the Commissioners-General onboard, while the *Komeet* did not sail to the East.²¹⁶ The *Amazoon* never returned to the Netherlands, but was scrapped in Batavia in 1795. Another Dutch frigate to visit the Cape on convoy duty at this stage was the *Scipio* (20), now under the command of the attentive and articulate Captain Cornelis de Jong van Rodenburgh. She sailed from the Maas in December 1791 and arrived at the Cape in March 1792.²¹⁷

The Dutch had no standing naval organisation at the Cape to control their visiting warships, but while Frijkenius was at the Cape he acted as the senior naval officer present and coordinated naval movements and convoy duties between the Cape, Europe and the East. In

²¹³ D. Sleigh, *Die Buiteposte*, p.272.

²¹⁴ J.C. de Jonge, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Zeewezen*, IV, pp.751-2.

²¹⁵ N. Habermehl, *Joan Cornelis van der Hoop* p.151.

²¹⁶ J.C. de Jonge, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Zeewezen*, IV, p.752.

²¹⁷ J.R. Bruijn et al, *Dutch-Asiatic shipping*, I, p.249.

February 1793 he ordered Vaillant's ships, the *Zephir* and *Havik*, to convoy twelve Dutch ships to Europe. On 13 May 1793 De Jong received secret orders from Frijkenius to convoy East Indiamen back to Europe with the *Scipio* and the *Komeet*.²¹⁸ Before De Jong departed, they were blocked-up in Table Bay by a severe north-westerly storm on 19 May 1793. Such weather, he wrote, was very dangerous to shipping as the wind blew into the bay and it seemed that the water was boiling: "... de zee is kokend ... voor geen schip uittehouden en voor geen touw te weerstaan".²¹⁹ Anchor cables broke, fire beacons were lit ashore and two VOC ships, the *Sterrenschans* and the *Zeeland*, stranded during the night. The warships were not in trouble, as they were equipped with better quality ropes and anchors than the VOC ships. When De Jong and his convoy (now six ships) arrived at St Helena Island on 14 June 1793, the British confirmed to them that France had declared war against Britain and the Dutch Republic.²²⁰

Though the Dutch were concerned about the French privateers operating from Mauritius, their movements were somewhat restricted by the British frigates cruising around the island, while Mauritius apparently feared a British attack.²²¹ Nonetheless, in April 1794 a Danish ship reported that a French privateer from Mauritius, the *La Ville de Bourdeaux* (44) with a crew of 450, had captured the VOC ship *Expeditie* at sea on 7 January. The Council of Policy reiterated that all outgoing VOC ships had to be inspected by the *Equipagemeester* to see if they were capable of defending themselves.²²²

Due to the war with France the Cape provided no supplies to Mauritius, but ships under a neutral flag were often suspected of carrying supplies to Mauritius. This was the case with the *Le Marchand Toscan* (under neutral Tuscan flag) that ostensibly planned to go to Ceylon and the East with the Cape products. She departed from the Cape on 18 March 1794, but apparently sprung a leak at sea on 21 April, which became so bad that the ship had to make for Mauritius. It appears that she was so damaged and the cost of repairs so high, that the ship was sold and could not deliver the goods to the contracted persons on Ceylon. Yet, rumour had it that Mauritius was very thankful to receive Cape products such as wheat, flour, butter, wine and other provisions.²²³

²¹⁸ NAN 2.01.29.03 – 9, Journaal gehouden aan boord van 't Lands fregat *Scipio*, from 6/8/1791 to 17/7/1796, see specifically 18/6/1792, 5/2/1793 and 13/5/1793.

²¹⁹ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, I, pp.203-4.

²²⁰ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, I, p.206.

²²¹ NAN 2.01.29.03 – 10, C. de Jong, Rapport aan hun Edele Mogende de Heren gecommiteerde Raad ter Amiraliteit op de Maase, 21/9/1795.

²²² C223, Resolutiën, 22/4/1794, pp.30-115, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²²³ C231, Resolutiën, 2/3/1795, pp.91-105, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

Secret orders for, and the secret signals to be used for identification by the ships in the 1795 VOC return fleet, were issued in September 1793. Britain was not an enemy yet, and it stipulated that the ships had to meet additional warships to escort them in the north Atlantic (on the height of the “Vlaamsche eilanden”).²²⁴ In 1794 De Jong (with the frigate *Scipio* and the brig *Komeet*) escorted an outgoing fleet of nine VOC ships safely from the Netherlands and arrived at the Cape in November 1794. He then had to wait at the Cape to escort the 1795 return fleet back to the Netherlands. De Jong reported that Gordon came onboard when he arrived at the Cape and he was well received by Sluysken. They urgently wished to know how the war was progressing. He availed his ships to the Cape for defensive purposes for the duration of their stay. De Jong also requested new masts, as his ship was worn-out as a result of the constant service. The Cape could, however, not provide everything he required because a big shortage of wood for masts and spars existed.²²⁵

By early 1795 there were nine homeward bound ships in Table Bay, but it was decided to wait for the more ships before the *Scipio* and *Komeet* departed with the convoy. These ships were of pertinent importance to the VOC and as much concern existed about their safety, the Amsterdam *Kamer* requested that ships should not be delayed at the Cape. Seven more of the return ships De Jong was waiting for arrived on 11 March, but as the scant news from the Netherlands was not positive, the sailing date was extended.²²⁶ The Council of Policy thought that if the ships sail before they had reliable news, they might be in even greater danger: “reedenen van een zeer zeeker of allerwaarschijnlijkste gevaar”.²²⁷

The Cape authorities were worried about the safety of the VOC return ships during winter. By February 1795 Hout Bay was considered as an alternative anchorage, because ships at anchor in Simon’s Bay could be attacked from the sea, while the attackers would still be out of range of the shore guns. The feasibility of moving the return ships to Hout Bay was investigated, but concern existed over the military preparedness of Hout Bay and a commission (R.J. Gordon and E. Bergh) found it inadequate. As they wanted to prevent the fiasco of 1781, the *Equipagemeester* was ordered to promptly survey Hout Bay, indicate where ships should anchor to be under the covering fire of the batteries and draw up a plan for defending ships

²²⁴ NAN VOC11221, Vergadering Secreete Zaken aan Commandeur en opperhoofden der retourscheepen van ... aankomst aan Cabo de Goede Hoop, 10/9/1793.

²²⁵ NAN 2.01.29.03 – 10, C. de Jong, Rapport aan ... Raad ter Amiraliteit op de Maase, 21/9/1795.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ C231, Resolutiën, 8/4/1795, pp.106-14, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

against an attack from the sea.²²⁸ Despite these preparations, the anchorage at Hout Bay was too small for such a number of ships (not more than six or seven ships could anchor in safety) and the Council of Policy did not want to split the ships up. As a result the ships were ordered to go to False Bay in April to await news from the Netherlands and a final decision. They had to be kept ready to sail at the shortest notice.²²⁹

On 8 April De Jong escorted seventeen ships (nine VOC ships and chartered vessels) from Table Bay to Simon's Bay. On 12 April 1795, Captain Simon Dekker with the frigate *Medemblik* (36) and two East Indiamen, destined for Batavia, anchored in Simon's Bay.²³⁰ The *Medemblik*, the *Brakel* (56), Captain Oorthuys, and eight merchantmen in convoy sailed from Texel on 22 December 1794. The convoy was separated by a storm in the English Channel and Dekker feared that if the other ships did not arrive soon, they might have been captured. The *Brakel* never reached her destination as she went to England and was captured after the war broke out.²³¹ The *Medemblik* had to undergo repairs and required provisions before she could sail to the East. As reports reached the Cape that there were no privateers around Mauritius, the ship *Voorland* decided not to wait for the *Medemblik*, but sailed to Batavia on 27 April.²³²

As more ships from Ceylon and China arrived in the meantime, Simon's Bay was now quite full with 23 vessels at anchor.²³³ Captains Dekker and De Jong decided that the warships had to protect the East Indiamen in the anchorage. On 4 May 1795 the unarmed and lightly armed ships were ordered to anchor closest to the shore, under cover of the fire from the batteries, the heavier armed ships were anchored in the second rank and the frigates were on the outside, in a line ahead formation, to provide the best defensive fire in the case of an enemy attack.²³⁴

On 14 April 1795 the British ship *Swallow* arrived from St Helena Island with an offer from Lord Macartney (on his way back to Britain) to provide British protection to the returning Dutch East Indiamen in his convoy. The Council of Policy simply replied that they would make a

²²⁸ CA, C222, Resolutiën, 23/3/1794, p.370; C231 Resolutiën (Secreet), 20/021795, p.89; and C229 Resolutiën, 13/3/1795, pp.140-1.

²²⁹ C231, Resolutiën, 8/4/1795, pp.106-14, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²³⁰ NAN 2.01.29.03 – 10, C. de Jong, Rapport aan ... Raad ter Amiraliteit op de Maase, 21/9/1795.

²³¹ J.C. Mollema, *Geschiedenis van Nederland ter Zee*, Volume III, p.322.

²³² C231, Resolutiën (Secreet), 16/4/1795, pp.115-9; and C230, Resolutiën, 20/4/1795, pp.7-42, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²³³ NAN 2.01.29.03 – 10, C. de Jong, Rapport aan ... Raad ter Amiraliteit op de Maase, 21/9/1795.

²³⁴ NAN 2.01.29.03 – 9, Journaal gehouden aan boord van 't Lands fregat *Scipio*, see specifically 23/4/1795 and 4/5/1795. Also C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, II, pp.127-9.

note of it: “aantekening te houden”.²³⁵ Was the noble Lord Macartney aware of the situation in Europe and the status of the Prince of Orange? It might be possible that a fast sailing ship warned St Helena Island. (At this stage Dutch ships in British harbours were already seized.) When the VOC ships sailed soon afterwards, British cruisers from St Helena Island were anyhow waiting for them and captured quite a few. With such potentially rich prizes as VOC East Indiamen for the taking, anything was possible.

De Jong was getting anxious. On 1 May he wrote to Sluysken stating that according to his orders he had to sail by the end of April at the latest. Sluysken requested the warships to stay a bit longer in the hope that they might receive reliable news from the Netherlands, so that they could decide if the ships should stay at the Cape, or sail to the Netherlands. After the *Medemblik* arrived, they received no reliable news on the situation in the Netherlands and the valuable return ships represented “een Schat waar na de Maatschappij in haar tegenswoordige droevige omstandigheeden reikhalzende moet verlangen ...”.²³⁶ The Cape authorities were naturally worried about the safety of these ships and as the season was changing and the northerly winds would soon blow, it was getting late for ships to sail to Europe. Winter weather would make the passage arduous for some ships and it would be difficult to keep such a large convoy together at sea. It was also dangerous for the ships to stay in Simon’s Bay, as its anchorage was small, the bay had no effective defences, an attack from Mauritius was possible and the threat of French privateers was omnipresent. The Council of Policy decided on 11 May not to wait longer and that the sixteen return ships must be prepared to sail with the *Scipio* and *Komeet* to the Netherlands at the first good wind.²³⁷ Sluysken notified De Jong that he had to decide on a sailing date and that the ships from Ceylon and China should join the convoy.²³⁸

De Jong knew that the Dutch Republic was supposed to be strongly aligned to Britain, but as he realised it might have changed, they had to be vigilant at sea: “... dat vriend vijand en vijand vriend is geworden ... daar wij, een schip ontmoetende, niet weten zullen, wie onze vriend, wie onze vijand...”.²³⁹ Before they sailed, the Captain of an American brig that departed from New York on 22 February and arrived in Simon’s Bay on 19 May 1795, told Dekker that peace existed between the Dutch and the French.²⁴⁰ Yet, they had no certainty.

²³⁵ CA C230, Resolutiën, 16/4/1795, pp.2-3.

²³⁶ CA C231, Resolutiën (Secreet), 11/5/1795, pp.120-9.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ NAN 2.01.29.03 – 10, C. de Jong, Rapport aan ... Raad ter Amiraliteit op de Maase, 21/9/1795.

²³⁹ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, II, p.127.

²⁴⁰ NAN 2.01.29.03 – 9, Journaal gehouden aan boord van ‘t Lands fregat *Scipio*, see 19/5/1795; and NAN 2.01.29.03 – 10, C. de Jong, Rapport aan ... Raad ter Amiraliteit op de Maase, 21/9/1795.

Before De Jong sailed two more East Indiamen arrived from Batavia, but they did not join the convoy as they were waiting for two more ships. On 18 May the *Scipio* and the *Komeet* departed with the convoy. The convoy consisted of sixteen East Indiamen, the *Siam*, *Washington*, *Zwaan*, *Zeelelij*, *Alblasserdam*, *Zuidpool*, *Houghlij*, *Kromhout*, *Mentor*, *Surseance*, *Dordwijk*, *Vrouw Agatha*, *Geertruij Petronella*, *Dordrecht*, *Meermin*, *Herstelder* and the packet *Vlijt*, therefore nineteen ships altogether.²⁴¹ De Jong was very worried about the weak protection he could provide and was afraid they might meet a strong enemy at sea. Such a rich fleet (with a value of about 10 million Guilders at that stage), crucial to the Netherlands, was assembled in wartime, yet the naval protection was so poor. Only two minor warships had to escort the richly laden ships through the Atlantic, brimming with privateers and warships preying on rich merchantman. De Jong reported that as he lacked reliable information about events in Europe, he ordered the Captains to keep well clear of St Helena Island. An American ship they met at sea, on 7 July, informed them of a new alliance with France. De Jong immediately realised that they now faced a much stronger enemy at sea and had to be more alert.²⁴²

This was the last VOC return fleet and it was an inglorious affair. After the convoy sailed on 18 May, some ships turned around two days later due to bad weather, while most of the convoy scattered soon afterwards. Of the eleven VOC ships, nine were captured around St Helena Island by British ships, while two eventually reached Scandinavian ports. Of the nine captured ships, one crew destroyed their own vessel, while two other ships were wrecked.²⁴³

8. CONCLUSION

By 1795, while the French Revolutionary War was ferociously being fought in Europe, the strife-torn settlement at the Cape was still Dutch. Because it controlled the passage to the Indies it was described as the “key” to the East and the Cape assumed great strategic value when the maritime empires of the day became locked in an international contest. They soon competed for control of the Cape, while world events would have a severe impact on the Cape.

Big profits were to be made from the trade with the East and as British interest in India grew considerably, their anxiety about the Cape and their urge to control it, becomes obvious.

²⁴¹ NAN 2.01.29.03 – 10, C. de Jong, Rapport aan ... Raad ter Amiraliteit op de Maase, 21/9/1795. J.R. Bruijn, et al (eds), *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping*, II, pp.568-72, stated that the *Makassar* departed from the Cape on 16 May and that she was captured by the British off St Helena in June 1795. De Jong, however, does not mention her in his report dated 21/9/1795.

²⁴² C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, II, pp.138 and 152.

²⁴³ J.R. Bruijn, et al (eds), *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping*, II, pp.568-72.

Britain had to have the Cape, it was strategically too important to risk having it in French hands. While Britain was aligned to the Netherlands, it was not possible to act belligerently towards the Cape, or to occupy it militarily. British efforts to station troops at the Cape failed because they were not prepared to place the troops under VOC command, while a British force under British control at the Cape would effectively amount to a military occupation, which the Dutch were not prepared to allow. When France invaded the Netherlands and the Stadtholder fled to Britain, it immediately provided the pretext to despatch a British force to the Cape. Sea power made it possible for Britain to send a force to the Cape and the fact that the Dutch and the French lacked a comparable ability, led to it reaching the Cape safely.

Despite the strategic location of the Cape and the fact that it often supported naval squadrons, to the Dutch it was essentially a place for refreshing their ships and not a naval base. It was obvious by the 1790's that a trading company (with profit as its main purpose) on the verge of bankruptcy was not capable of preparing for a war with truly global proportions. The VOC did not create and maintain the comprehensive defensive system necessary for the Cape. Even though new defences were indeed created and the Cape was better defended immediately after the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, it was soon neglected again and the troop strength declined.

Naval protection was a necessity, not only for the rich return fleets that carried the wealth of the VOC, but also for the Cape. The Dutch Republic supported the VOC monetarily and by despatching various squadrons to the East. In addition the State even emphasised the value of the Cape, appreciated its defencelessness and acknowledged that a naval squadron was the best way to defend it, yet, with the Republic in crisis they did not have the ability to provide the forces necessary to really secure the Cape. By the 1790's the only naval support the Dutch State provided was frigates to escort VOC convoys. Defence of the Cape against the powerful maritime empires of the day, was therefore in the hands of a rundown VOC and the small divided local population at the Cape.

By 1795 the situation was as follows: from the British perspective they had no alternative but to take control of the Cape. At the Cape the state of affairs was lamentable; politically it was divided, economically it was in crisis and its defence was simply inadequate. It had a small garrison, many of its fortifications were not complete and in False Bay it was totally insufficient, while no naval force was present and the prospect of naval protection did not exist. Was it possible to conduct a proper defence in such a situation? This will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 8

THE VOC DEFENCE OF THE CAPE: AN HONOURABLE CAPITULATION?

“Whosoever commands the sea commands the trade; whoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world, and consequently the world itself” (Sir Walter Raleigh, 1616).¹

1. INTRODUCTION

In his account of mid-eighteenth century life at the Cape, Captain Alleman stated: “If the English intend to sail into False Bay, to put their troops ashore there, to carry on the war by land and to attack the Cape from the land side, then assuredly the Cape is lost. Poor Cape!”² “Poor Cape” indeed – what was to follow after Alleman’s death was exactly this, and it brought an end to an era. But Alleman was not alone, and as the previous chapters illustrated, many prominent Dutch military figures and administrators also implored the VOC and the Dutch Republic to be more serious about the defence of the Cape. In 1784 Gordon pleaded with the *Heeren XVII* to improve the defence of the Cape, warning if it was not done, they would meet their doom: “...uyt gebrek van tyds genoomen militaire maatregelen tot op den oever van haar verderff...”.³

The VOC period at the Cape came to an end in 1795, a time of revolution, war, turmoil and change. Though geographically isolated at the southern tip of Africa, South Africa did not escape the effects of this tumultuous period. Britain took over the Cape and they have influenced South African history ever since. The reasons for the British takeover were no doubt linked to the commercial value of British trade. As trade required protection, safe sea routes and ports, sea power was crucial for Britain’s commercial and imperial success and the conquest of the Cape is part and parcel of the process through which Britain attained mastery at sea. It was essentially British sea power along with the projection of that power, and the lack of a comparable ability amongst her opponents, that made the conquest of the Cape possible.

¹ J. Baylis, et al, *Strategy in the Contemporary World. An Introduction to Strategic Studies*, p.117.

² O.F. Mentzel, *Life at the Cape in Mid-Eighteenth Century*, p.151.

³ CA VC117, Gordon – *Heeren XVII*, 1/5/1784, p.10.

By June 1795 Elphinstone and Craig neared the Cape with the British task force. Their orders were clear: they had to capture the Cape, either by inducing the VOC authorities to hand it over, or by force. The British commanders no doubt understood the challenges they faced, since a body of common wisdom on this type of operations already existed amongst the British services. They learned to master the techniques of amphibious warfare, during the Seven Years' War and the American War of Independence, and to respect the vital value of planning and preparation. Troops and equipment had to be assembled and embarked, the organisation of the armed forces had to be maintained during the voyage, while during the actual landings troops had to be properly commanded and moved with the assistance of the navy, while the navy, if necessary, had to provide gunfire support. Forces ashore then had to be supplied (with provisions, ammunition and equipment) from the sea.⁴ Elphinstone was responsible for the command of all ships (men-of-war and transports) and had to control their deployment and movement throughout and a clear chain of command had to be established to coordinate all operations. Already by 1763 guidelines to British officers stipulated that when a landing site was decided upon, "the whole command is given to a Sea Officer who conducts them to the place of landing ..."⁵ Once the men were out of the boats and actually set their feet ashore, Craig would take over command of the soldiers. A good working relationship between the commanders therefore had to exist throughout.

Navies and coastal fortifications were important for defence against maritime power projection, but if navies were not available, or the attackers side-stepped the fortifications, as the British did in 1795, then landward military forces became crucial for defence. The further away an enemy landed from the base or the centre of power, the greater its efforts would be and the longer operations would take. A comprehensive land based defence would make landward operations very difficult for the attacker.⁶ Furthermore, the military landscape of the eighteenth century placed many constraints on the offensive, since campaigns were costly and the risk to the offensive became greater as the lines of communication extended and the war became more time consuming. "The dictates of strategy, therefore, rendered the defensive supreme, without battle ever being joined".⁷ As a result, the defenders of the Cape were at an advantage, but did they make the most of it?

⁴ S. Foster, *Hit the Beach. The Drama of Amphibious Warfare*, pp.11-2.

⁵ Quoted in S. Foster, *Hit the Beach*, p.13 from a 1763 publication: J. MacIntire, *A Military Treatise on the Discipline of Marine Forces when at Sea, Together with Short Instructions for Detachments Sent to Attack on Shore*, p.225.

⁶ H.W. Richmond, *Imperial Defence and Capture at Sea in War*, p.112.

⁷ H. Strachan, *European Armies and the Conduct of War*, p.11.

The aim of this chapter is to provide a narrative of the British occupation of the Cape and to evaluate the conduct of those participating. The chapter will commence with the arrival of the British at the Cape, it will then explain how they were received and why military action started. Next, the operations will be discussed and finally the British conquest will be analyzed with special reference to the role of some of the prominent figures involved and the conduct of operations.

2. ARRIVAL OF THE BRITISH FORCE AT THE CAPE AND THE NEGOTIATIONS

2.1. The British Arrival and their Reception

Elphinstone and Blankett rendezvoused off Cape Point on 10 June 1795 and only sailed into False Bay the following day due to a strong wind.⁸ The British squadron consisted of ten ships: six ships of the line, three of 74 guns, the flagship the *HMS Monarch*, *HMS Arrogant* and *HMS Victorious*; three of 64 guns, the *HMS America*, *HMS Ruby*, *HMS Stately*; one frigate *HMS Sphynx* (24); two sloops of war, the *HMS Echo* (18) and *HMS Rattlesnake* (16); and the East Indiamen *Arniston*. However, the Dutch reports that eight warships had arrived was correct, as the *Arniston* was despatched to St Helena Island with orders and letters on 12 May (she joined the squadron later), and the slow-sailing *Rattlesnake* only arrived on 15 June.⁹

Only one Dutch warship was present at the Cape, the frigate *Medemblik* (36) with Captain Simon Dekker, on convoy duty to Batavia. At 12:30 on 11 June Dutch lookouts reported to Brandt (Post Holder also referred to as Resident in Simon's Bay) that eight warships arrived in False Bay without colours. That afternoon at 16:00, the ships were off Simon's Bay.¹⁰ As the British warships tacked into False Bay, Dekker thought that their objectives were not friendly and he prepared his ship for action. As they came closer the *Boetselaar Battery* fired a number of warning shots at the ships, while the *Medemblik* also fired a warning shot. This caused the

⁸ NAUK WO1/323, Journal G.K. Elphinstone, June 1795, p.263. For some or other reason this Journal is one day out of synchronisation (one day too early "12" is "11" and so on) in comparison with other documents. Therefore the researcher must add a day.

⁹ W.G. Perrin (ed), *The Keith Papers*, I, pp.215-6 and Elphinstone – Dundas, 17/6/1795, p.270.

¹⁰ NAUK WO1/323, Journal G.K. Elphinstone, June 1795, p.263; and CA C231, Resolutiën, 11/6/1795, pp.130-1.

British ships to anchor just outside Simon's Bay.¹¹ Elphinstone reported that three warning shots were fired at them, of which one fell just over the lee bow of the *Monarch*.¹²

Dekker sent his First Officer, Lieutenant Vegezak, to the flagship. Vegezak returned with a report for Sluysken and a letter for Dekker.¹³ Dekker was to signal to Brandt if the ships were friendly, but as this did not happen, Brandt assumed it was enemy ships. Dekker stated afterwards that he notified Brandt to take defensive measures.¹⁴ Elphinstone then sent an official, Mr Alexander Farquhar, ashore with letters for "the Governor" and Colonel Gordon.¹⁵ Dekker visited Elphinstone onboard the *Monarch* the next day, to see if it was possible to shed more light on what was happening, but he thought that their information regarding the true situation in the Netherlands was either very scant or the British were very secretive about it.¹⁶

At 17:30 on 11 June 1795, Sluysken received the distressing report that eight warships had sailed into False Bay without colours. A very dutiful sailor on duty at Muizenberg, Pieter Witstraaten, observed the warships entering Simon's Bay from the lookout position in Muizenberg at 16:00. Witstraaten thought the event so urgent that he, after relaying the signal, rode to the Castle in person to report what he saw.¹⁷ By 20:30 Sluysken heard from Brandt that it was British ships and two hours later the Council of Policy met. As they were unsure if the British were friend or foe, they decided to mobilise the militia at 23:00. It might have a negative impact if they were wrong, but if it was an enemy and they did not call-up the militia, it could have a grave effect.¹⁸

The response was poor because the interior was in turmoil, they experienced security problems and gross dissatisfaction existed with VOC control. Many of the discontented burghers on the frontier felt that the evils of a foreign yoke might not exceed the existing one or, if the VOC government could be overthrown, a new, independent one might be established.¹⁹

¹¹ S. Dekker, 'Relaas aan de Commissarisen Generaal over geheel Nederlands Indiën en Cabo de Goede Hoop...' in S.C. Nederburgh, *Echte Stukken betreffende het Volbragt Onderzoek*, pp.91-2.

¹² ADM50/64, Admirals Journals, Vice Admiral Elphinstone, *Monarch*, for the period 4/4/1795 to 13/11/1797, see 11/6/1795.

¹³ S. Dekker, 'Relaas aan de Commissarisen Generaal over geheel Nederlands Indiën en Cabo de Goede Hoop...' in S.C. Nederburgh, *Echte Stukken betreffende ...*, p.93.

¹⁴ CA VC76, Relaas gegeven door den 's Lands Kapitein Dekker, wegens het voorgevallene tusschen denzelve den Engelsche Admiraal Generaal Sir George Keith Elphinstone, en den Commissaris Sluysken aan Cabo de Goede Hoop, 12/8/1795, pp.287-9.

¹⁵ NAUK WO1/323, Journal G.K. Elphinstone, June 1795, p.263.

¹⁶ S. Dekker, 'Relaas aan de Commissarisen Generaal over geheel Nederlands Indiën en Cabo de Goede Hoop...' in S.C. Nederburgh, *Echte Stukken betreffende ...*, p.94.

¹⁷ CA C231, Resolutiën, 11/6/1795, pp.130-2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ G.E. Cory, *The Rise of South Africa*, p.56.

They were therefore not too keen to repulse an invader, especially since they were republican in their outlook and not Orange supporters. They would later also defied British control.

Farquhar asked Brandt on 12 June to provide him with a horse to go to Cape Town to deliver letters to Sluysken and Gordon, which included letters from Elphinstone and Craig as well as letters from David Scott, an Englishmen with whom both Gordon and Sluysken were acquainted. Farquhar arrived around midnight and Sluysken immediately called a Council of Policy meeting, which commenced at 02:30 on 13 June. They discussed the letter from Elphinstone and Craig which informed them about the order from the Prince of Orange. As he had important information to convey to them, Elphinstone invited Sluysken and Gordon to meet with him onboard his flagship. Elphinstone pointed out that he particularly wished to see Gordon - alone, if possible.²⁰ The Council decided that Sluysken and Gordon's presence were needed at the Cape, but requested that the information and the letter be sent to them by a trusted officer.

The Council of Policy immediately despatched De Lille to Simon's Town with an additional 200 infantrymen and 100 artillerymen to strengthen the Simon's Bay garrison of 110 infantrymen and 50 gunners. Brandt was instructed to permit the British ships to take in provisions, but armed men should not be allowed to land. The British squadron was in bad shape as there was a desperate water shortage on some of Blankett's ships and many men were suffering from scurvy - 187 on the *Victorious* alone.²¹ The Dutch allowed the sick to land and they were placed under medical care ashore.²²

When Farquhar returned from the Cape with letters on 13 June, Elphinstone wrote that "he thought Cape well disposed",²³ which probably refers to the system of fixed defences around Table Bay and the town. On the same day the British saw the Dutch reinforcements from the Cape, with a field gun, marching into Simon's Town.²⁴ The British warships had anchored in False Bay, just off the Simon's Bay anchorage on 12 June, but on Saturday 13 June they anchored inside Simon's Bay.²⁵ Blankett reported that ships' cutter went to fetch fresh water on

²⁰ CA C231, Resolutiën, 13/6/1795, pp.133-40.

²¹ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Admiralty, 17/6/1795, p.276.

²² P, Erskine, 'Admiral Elphinstone's Naval Task Force 1795 1796 the memorabilia of the first British Occupation', in *Antiques in South Africa*, 12 (1983) p.86.

²³ NAUK WO1/323, Journal G.K. Elphinstone, June 1795, p.264.

²⁴ NAUK WO1/323, Journal G.K. Elphinstone, June 1795, p.263.

²⁵ NAUK ADM51/1136, Captains Logs, Journal of the Proceedings of His Majesty's Ship *America* Commodore Blankett Commander, for the period 16/2/1795 to 27/1/1797, see 10 to 13/6/1795.

14 June, while watering of the ships commenced on 15 June. Up to 27 June the British squadron also received fresh beef and other victuals.²⁶

So how did the two forces compare? To recap: No Dutch naval force was stationed at the Cape, while in terms of fortifications Table Bay was well-fortified and certainly posed a threat to any attacker from the sea. Yet in False Bay, where the British were, the defences were lacking. Without foreign troops the Cape Garrison that had to face a potential invader was a depleted force as it consisted only of one regular infantry battalion with 571 officers and men, the locally raised *Pandoer Corps* (about 200 strong), 57 infantrymen from depots of the Meuron and Württemberg Regiments, 44 *sipahis* (Malay infantry), an Artillery Corps (with 430 men in total) as well as the burgher militia infantry and cavalry. The full time soldiers amounted to roughly 1302 officers and men, while in total the defenders would probably not be more than 3600.²⁷

The British had six ships of the line and three smaller warships. Because of their heavy armament these warships carried a formidable punch and could provide much support for troops operating along the coast. The squadron did not have many soldiers onboard, only the 515 men (2nd Battalion of the 78th Regiment) that Blankett embarked and about 400 Royal Marines in total. To be able to embark Craig's soldiers Blankett had disembarked the marines on his ships, but they were taken onboard Elphinstone's ships. In addition the British also had the crews of the warships, and they often disembark battalions of seamen to support forces ashore during amphibious operations. The main body of British soldiers under the command of Clarke, some 3000 soldiers, went to San Salvador to await further orders from Elphinstone.²⁸

The force Elphinstone had with him was therefore in no way significant as it lacked cavalry, draught animals, field artillery, heavy equipment and cash. It was not too threatening to the defenders, while the heavy British warships were certainly a major threat to Simon's Town and the fortifications in general. If the British performed an amphibious landing away from Cape Town and had to mount a campaign, it would be very difficult because of the lack of infrastructure, the bad roads and their weak soldiers (suffering from scurvy after a long voyage). Such an attacking enemy could be hindered in their advance by constant counterattacks with

²⁶ NAUK ADM51/1136, Captains Logs ...His Majesty's Ship *America*, see 14 to 27/6/1795.

²⁷ See CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de Overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, pp.33-5; and H.F. Nel, *Die Britse Verowering van die Kaap in 1795*, pp.23-5.

²⁸ NAUK WO6/20, Secretary of State Entry Book, Dundas – Blankett, 16/2/1795, pp.1-7; W.G. Perrin (ed), *The Keith Papers*, I, pp.215-6; W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa 1795-1895*, p.6; and G.M. Theal, *History of Africa South of the Zambesi*, III, p.338.

cavalry, or by Khoi soldiers who could use stealth and hide behind rocks or bushes.²⁹ Yet, the neglect of False Bay's defences meant that it was an ideal place for a hostile force to conduct a landing.

2.2. British-Dutch Negotiations

On 14 June two British officers, Captain Hardy of the *Echo* and Lieutenant-Colonel McKenzie of the 78th Regiment, delivered the Prince of Orange's letter and a report by Elphinstone and Craig on the situation in the Netherlands to Sluysken and the Council of Policy.³⁰ The report from Elphinstone and Craig mentioned the surrender of the Dutch armies to the French, the flight of Prince Willem to England and stated that Britain and her allies were "amassing large armies" to drive the French from the Netherlands.³¹ This information was deliberately incomplete and wrong: they did not want to reveal the enthusiastic welcome the French received at many cities, the fact that a new Dutch government was in place and that the States General had abolished the Stadtholdership. The British version concentrated on the ruthless French conquest.

The Council of Policy discussed the report and the content of the Stadtholder's letter, which ordered them to allow the British troops into the Castle, receive British warships and troops and accept them as forces of a friendly power that came to defend the Cape.³² Gordon accepted the British version and suggested that they welcome the British as allies on the provision that the Cape administration stay intact, that the Cape be held in the name of its lawful sovereign, and that the British troops resort under Sluysken's command – similar to the situation with the French troops at the Cape during the early 1780's.³³ Other members of the Council emphasised that their loyalty was to a country and not a party and since the letter was signed by a fugitive Prince in a foreign country, it did not carry much weight. The British should not be allowed to land and they had to play for time. Eventually the Council replied that the British could provision at Simon's Town and they expressed their gratitude for the British concern with

²⁹ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, I, p.114.

³⁰ NAUK WO1/323, Journal G.K. Elphinstone, June 1795, p.264.

³¹ CA C231, Resolutiën 13-14/06/1795, Elphinstone and Craig – Council of Policy, 13//6/1795, pp.152-6.

³² *Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History*, Prince of Orange – Governor of the Cape, 7/2/1795, pp.2-3.

³³ CA C231, Resolutiën, 13-14/06/1795, pp.165-6.

the defence of the Cape. If the French attacked, they would welcome British assistance, but in the meantime the Cape was altogether capable of defending itself against an enemy power!³⁴

While waiting for a reply from Sluysken and the Council, McKenzie walked around Cape Town in the company of two EEIC officials at the Cape, Messrs Cust and Owen. McKenzie did his utmost to obtain as much political and military information as possible and reported to Craig that: "I am endeavouring to get every information as to their Forces, posts, provisions, population...". On the defences he reported: "... the works are by no means in a finished state and I am satisfied that we can get safely round behind them from what I have seen and learned".³⁵ In the meantime Captain Hardy met with Gordon at his house. During their meeting Gordon stated that he would protect the Cape against a British attack, but if the British came to "... protect the Cape in favour of the Prince of Orange, he was very glad to see [them]".³⁶ Hardy informed Elphinstone on 15 June that troops were encamped at Muizenberg with militia cavalry and four guns. Elphinstone also ordered his officers going ashore with the water parties to gain as much intelligence as possible.³⁷

After the British arrived many of the burghers and soldiers were suspicious of Gordon. Gordon's loyalty to the House of Orange and the fact that he wished to accept British protection because he viewed them as friends, and the French as enemies, was well known. Being from Scottish descent, he had an attachment to his former colleagues in the Scottish Brigade and his pro-British sentiments were always evident. Dalrymple reported that Gordon had an "English heart tho Born in Holland" and even suggested that in the event of a British attack on the Cape, Gordon might "rise against" VOC rule.³⁸ The British actually seemed to have been of the conviction that Gordon would welcome a British attack and if he received assistance, he could even convince the Garrison to change sides.³⁹ John Pringle, the EEIC agent at the Cape, supported this notion and thought Gordon would be replaced if France overran Holland.⁴⁰

Elphinstone and Craig must have been aware of the way in which Gordon was perceived, hence their anxiety to meet with him and the letters (the contents of which are unknown) Farquhar delivered to him and Sluysken. Elphinstone received a reply from Sluysken

³⁴ CA C231, Resolutiën, 13-14/06/1795, Council of Policy – Elphinstone and Craig 14/6/1795, pp.167-8.

³⁵ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, McKenzie – Craig, not dated, p.47.

³⁶ See Captain Hardy's account of the meeting in P. Cullinan, *Robert Jacob Gordon*, p.176.

³⁷ NAUK WO1/323, Journal G.K. Elphinstone, June 1795, pp.265.

³⁸ C.J. Barnard, *Robert Jacob Gordon*, pp.408 and 412.

³⁹ NAUK WO1/323, Journal G.K. Elphinstone, June 1795, pp.264-6.

⁴⁰ P. Cullinan, *Robert Jacob Gordon*, p.175.

on the 12 June and four days later from Gordon.⁴¹ Gordon wrote to Elphinstone on 14 June that he welcomed the British presence to guard the Cape against the French as he held French principles and their supporters (*Patriotten*) in contempt, referring to them as "endocrinated dupes". He stated that he was a loyal Orange supporter and "... I shall serve the Common cause with all my Exertions ..." and if Holland "... should surrender ... then I am a Greatbritainer".⁴² This provides unequivocal confirmation of Gordon's loyalties and explains much of his subsequent behaviour.

The Dutch authorities at the Cape were in somewhat of a predicament. As far as they knew, Great Britain and the Netherlands were allied. However, the letter from Guepin (dated October 1794) and the report from Dekker indicated that the Netherlands was under French attack. Guepin actually warned that the Dutch could suddenly change sides and that they had to prepare to defend the Cape. Hence the dilemma – who was the rightful government of the Netherlands and should the British be considered as allies or not? To complicate matters, the Cape authorities could not count on the loyalty and support of the whole garrison and the burghers because of the problems in the colony and unhappiness with VOC control. Add to this the fact that the majority of the burghers and troops were republican supporters of the *Patriotten*, opposed to the Stadtholder and in favour of an alliance with France, while most of the VOC officials and officers (including Sluysken and Gordon) were loyal supporters of the House of Orange. To the senior officials the idea of French control must have been horrifying as it represented the application of Jacobean principles, the elimination of classes, the guillotine and freedom to the slaves. Britain thus represented the known old order and the protection of their lives and property. Therefore, many of them probably welcomed the British presence. In this situation the necessary trust between the soldiers and their officers and the burgher militia and the VOC officers surely did not exist.⁴³

One interesting piece of information never commented on is an entry in the Journal of the frigate *Scipio*. The entry, dated 19 May, indicated that an American brig arrived in Simon's Bay and reported that there was peace between France and the Netherlands. No mention of any state of war with Britain was made.⁴⁴ Was Sluysken aware of this? Probably, but then it was in no way substantiated.

⁴¹ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Elphinstone Journal, pp.59-60.

⁴² *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Gordon – Elphinstone, 14/6/1795, p.45.

⁴³ H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind*, p.45.

⁴⁴ NAN 2.01.29.03 – 9, Journaal gehouden aan boord van 't Lands fregat *Scipio*, from 6/8/1791 to 17/7/1796, see specifically 19/5/1795.

The objective of the British military command was still the same: they had to convince the Council of Policy that the Cape should be handed over to the British. Yet, they were not having success and next, Sir James Craig descended upon Cape Town himself. He is described by contemporaries as "... experienced and skilled, short but a muscular 'pocket Hercules' unpopular for his quick temper and pomposity, but a kind and generous friend".⁴⁵ On 19 June he explained to the Council that as the fleet and troops were sent to protect the Colony the Cape should be placed under British "protection", after occupation no alterations would be made in the laws and customs of the country and officials would retain their appointments until a decision was received from the British Crown. He also offered to take the VOC troops into British service on the condition that they take an oath of loyalty to the British Crown. These proposals were summarily turned down and the Council of Policy undertook to defend the Cape as well as the lawful constitution of the Netherlands.⁴⁶

Similar to the previous two British officers that visited the Cape, Craig also walked through Cape Town with Cust and Owen, which gave him the opportunity to appreciate the defensive works and terrain.⁴⁷ In this way several senior British officers acquainted themselves with the strengths and weaknesses of the Cape defensive system. In addition, by travelling from Simon's Town to Cape Town gave them a good idea of the topography and the kind of natural obstacles that would make an assault on Cape Town, from False Bay, difficult. In essence, it was possible for the British commanders to easily gain valuable operational intelligence.

However, Elphinstone was already a few steps ahead. After McKenzie gave him the letters from the Cape on 15 June, he wrote in his journal that the situation was "rather unfavourable".⁴⁸ Immediately other options were investigated and permission was requested for Craig to meet with Sluysken. The next day, on 16 June, he ordered one of his ships to Saldanha Bay to reconnoitre the area and to patrol the coast.⁴⁹ Despite the fact that the negotiation process and the diplomacy continued, even before Craig met with the Council of Policy, Elphinstone's mind was made up and by 16 June he knew that the only way to succeed would be by force of arms. Clarke was ordered to the Cape, and Elphinstone made it clear that much depended on Clarke's force stating: "You need not doubt how anxiously on every account I wish to see you" as "friendship" with the Dutch, was "out of the question". Clarke was ordered

⁴⁵ P.J. Haythornthwaite, *The Armies of Wellington*, p.161.

⁴⁶ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Sluysken – Craig, 19/6/1795, p.65.

⁴⁷ H.F. Nel, *Die Britse Verowering van die Kaap in 1795*, p.61.

⁴⁸ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone Journal, 15/6/1795, p.267.

⁴⁹ *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, I, Elphinstone – Spencer, 16/6/1795, p.32.

to bring “a good supply of cash ... silver in Spanish dollars ... gold is the next best”.⁵⁰ Elphinstone also wrote to the Portuguese Governor of San Salvador that Clarke’s force had to come to their aid at the Cape, but as he did not have sufficient warships available to provide a large escort, he asked if Portuguese warships could be spared to convoy Clarke’s force to the Cape.⁵¹ Furthermore, Elphinstone informed Governor Brooke on St Helena Island of the “considerable smallness” of his force, added that it was of “the greatest importance that our numbers here should be increased as speedily as possible”, and requested troops, ships, artillery as well as “a supply of silver”.⁵² On 18 June the *Sphynx* departed to St Helena Island and San Salvador, while the *Echo* went to Saldanha Bay.⁵³ With a strong naval squadron the British had command of the sea; they could patrol the coast and request urgent reinforcements – even from another continent!

Gordon remains one of the most fascinating and controversial characters connected to these events. Marnitz recognized his intellectual capacity and stated he was a man of science, proud of his scholarly ability. However, he was not really interested in the military science: “op de krijgskundige weetenschappen scheen hy zig niet besonders toegelegd en dus daarvan ook geen al te groote kennis gehad te hebben”.⁵⁴ In addition, Marnitz described Gordon as headstrong and committed, he maintained himself at a peak level of fitness and lived a modest and respectable life, but he warned that Gordon could be vengeful. Gordon’s biographers and historians have toiled with the idea of Gordon’s “honour” and his legacy. Was he a traitor or a hero? He is often painted as the tragic hero, a victim of circumstances in a vastly changing world, a Shakespearean-like figure, even reminiscent of Brutus in *Julius Caesar*.

Gordon’s unequivocal loyalty to the House of Orange was mentioned, but after the British arrival he must have been in a predicament: should he act according to his principles and not have any part in the defence of the Cape, or act as a soldier, supposedly a-political and follow the orders of the political authority and lawful government? As the Netherlands was evidently under French control or aligned to the French, and as the political authority at the Cape (the Council of Policy) supported the House of Orange, the dilemma was even worse! So, should he and a few other officials not devise a scheme to facilitate the British “protection” of the Cape or a British takeover? In 1994 an important incident for students of these events went unnoticed as a

⁵⁰ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Clarke, 17/6/1795, p.269.

⁵¹ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Governor-General San Salvador, 16/6/1795, p.268.

⁵² *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Brooke, 17/6/1795, pp.274-5.

⁵³ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone Journal, 18/6/1795, p.267.

⁵⁴ CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de Overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, pp.511-3.

set of four letters, previously unknown to historians, appeared from which Gordon's clandestine support for the British cause became clear.⁵⁵

The first of these letters concerned the brig *Emelia*, a Danish ship or under the Danish flag (being a neutral flag) at the Cape, set to sail to Mauritius. If France and the Netherlands were allies, it would have been in Dutch interest to allow her to sail to Mauritius to provide the French with news of the British task force, as they might send assistance to the Cape. If the Netherlands and France were not allied, the Cape would also gain from the ship sailing to Mauritius as it would bolster the defence of the Cape in French eyes. So, if the ship was delayed, it would only be in the British interest. Gordon alerted Elphinstone to the fact that the ship was probably not Danish, and that she might sail to Mauritius any day. In fact, he went so far as to suggest that the British should thoroughly search her stating: "if searched at sea all letters carefully lookid for, and the addresses on the cargo".⁵⁶ Gordon then induced the Council of Policy to place an embargo on the Danish brig, and when it was done, he immediately reported it to Elphinstone in another letter.⁵⁷ These two letters (and two others) were not part of the Elphinstone correspondence previously available. Why not? We will never know. Perhaps Elphinstone removed these letters because he appreciated how powerful, and damning it would be to the reputation of Gordon. We shall return to the Gordon story later.

In comparison with Gordon, the position and subsequent action of Dekker is noteworthy. Dekker was also a loyal supporter of the House of Orange and had much to loose from a revolution. During the turbulences of 1786 the *Patriotten* arrested him and two fellow officers, detained them for a while and then court-martialled them in 1787, because they did not join the cause of the *Patriotten* and their warships posed a threat to the *Patriotten*.⁵⁸

Elphinstone reported that he showed Dekker a copy of the letter from the Prince of Orange when he visited him onboard the *Monarch*, and Dekker "was affected" because of his loyalty to the Prince. On 13 June Elphinstone visited Dekker in person. He requested Dekker to delay his departure to Batavia and as the French had taken the Netherlands and the Stadtholder had to flee, Dekker should place himself under the British command.⁵⁹ On 15 June Dekker wrote to Elphinstone that he is sorry to hear about the Prince of Orange for whom he was ready "to lay down [his] life" and it is sad that he might be called upon to fight against his country. However, his orders were to escort the two VOC ships to Batavia and he was not prepared to

⁵⁵ These letters are in the possession of the Brenthurst Library in Johannesburg.

⁵⁶ BL MS344/153, Gordon – Elphinstone, 16/6/1795.

⁵⁷ BL MS344/154, Gordon – Elphinstone, 16/6/1795.

⁵⁸ T. Roodhuyzen, *In woelig vaarwater*, pp.88 and 94.

⁵⁹ CA VC76, Relas gegeven door den 's Lands Kapitein Dekker..., pp.292-3 and 301.

endanger the frigate the State entrusted to him as well as the two East Indiamen put in his care. His intention therefore was, to sail and inform the Council in Batavia of the state of affairs.⁶⁰ Elphinstone's reaction was that he "was surprised at this change of sentiments in him".⁶¹ He stated that he was sorry about Dekker's choice and again told him that the British were there to defend the Cape against the French.⁶²

On 16 June Dekker reiterated his position to Elphinstone stating: "I cannot sufficiently express the sorrow I felt when I saw in it the construction you were pleased to put upon my principles". But Dekker emphasised that he had to follow orders and their common purpose was to protect and defend their colonies against a common enemy. As Elphinstone requested that he should not visit any French port, Dekker assured Elphinstone that it would not happen.⁶³ Elphinstone was in a predicament as to what to do since the *Medemblik*, as one of the newer, larger Dutch frigates, would have been valuable to him. He wanted to prevent Dekker from sailing, but if he acted in a hostile way it might jeopardise their success. He therefore let the *Medemblik* go " ... rather than to risque hostilities, which might deprive us of our present footing, and thereby afford the French an opportunity of introducing themselves".⁶⁴

After the British arrived Sluysken had requested Dekker not to leave since the British ships alarmed the Cape "aannaderen der Engelse Scheepen 's Land ten sterkste gealarmeerd had". Dekker immediately answered Sluysken that he will do his duty even in case of an enemy attack.⁶⁵ When Elphinstone's designs became clear and he pressured Dekker to relinquish his command, Dekker was troubled by Elphinstone's demands and became disenchanted because the Cape authorities took no decisive action. In deciding whether to assist the Cape or leave, he realised that with one frigate and its crew he had insufficient force to act against the British and he would not be able to prevent an amphibious landing.⁶⁶ He wrote to Sluysken on 20 June that he cannot relinquish the State's frigate he commanded and he must follow his orders, which he will do while he still had the opportunity and he will report the critical situation at the Cape to Batavia. Dekker also gave Sluysken a veiled warning, just as his first responsibility is to keep

⁶⁰ NAUK WO1/323, Cape of Good Hope, Dekker – Elphinstone, 15/6/1795, pp.243-4.

⁶¹ NAUK WO1/323, Journal G.K. Elphinstone, June 1795, pp.264 and 266.

⁶² S. Dekker, 'Relaas aan de Commissarisen Generaal over geheel Nederlands Indiën en Cabo de Goede Hoop...' in S.C. Nederburgh, *Echte Stukken betreffende ...*, pp.95-6.

⁶³ NAUK WO1/323, Cape of Good Hope, Dekker – Elphinstone, 16/6/1795, p.255; and *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Dekker, 16/6/1795.

⁶⁴ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Elphinstone - Dundas, 17/6/1795, pp.61-2.

⁶⁵ A copy of Dekker's reply to Sluysken on 12/6/1795 is in CA VC76, Relaas gegeven door den 's Lands Kapitein Dekker..., pp.304-5.

⁶⁶ S. Dekker, 'Relaas aan de Commissarisen Generaal over geheel Nederlands Indiën en Cabo de Goede Hoop...' in S.C. Nederburgh, *Echte Stukken betreffende ...*, p.99.

his ship, Sluysken had to stick to his colony: “alles in het werk Stellen en zo veel ik kan myn ... aanwenden om 't Fregat te behouden, waarvoor ik zo wel verantwoording verschuldigd ben, als Uwel Edele Groot achtb het voor het behoud van de Colonie is”.⁶⁷ It is apparent that Dekker understood the divided loyalties and the slackness with which the Cape would be defended.

When the *Medemblik* sailed on 22 June, Dekker gave Elphinstone a thirteen-gun salute and received eleven in return. When he arrived in Batavia, on 9 August, Dekker handed the letter of the Prince of Orange to the authorities, but they did not regard a letter from a renegade prince as of any value.⁶⁸ Though Dekker personally had much to loose because of his opposition to the *Patriotten* and his Orange loyalty, he proved himself a committed and honourable officer.

2.3. The Failure of the Negotiations and the Dutch Withdrawal from Simon's Town

Specifically after Craig's visit it was evident that the British objective was to take control of the Cape (he had basically insisted on its capitulation) and as a result the relationship between the British force and the Cape authorities became tenser. Elphinstone and Craig now started to increase the pressure and stated that they offered the Cape authorities “a fair deal” as they would take officials and troops, that took the “oath of fidelity” to the British King into service. Again, on 21 June, the Council declined the offer.⁶⁹ In the meantime, after Craig's visit to Cape Town, there was some slackness with supplying the British and some Dutch soldiers in Simon's Town as well as the armed guard at the hospital were removed.⁷⁰

Elphinstone complained to Sluysken that he is “not a little grieved, nor less astonished at the Sudden alteration of affairs at this place” when he found out that his supplies have been cut off, that the Dutch troops had marched during the night, that all the inhabitants had fled even though he had embarked “men in a dying State” and that Captain Cust of the EEIC “although in a bad State of health”, were ordered out of Cape Town.⁷¹ Elphinstone was playing the ethical card, emphasising that the Dutch were causing distress to the sick and the frail, while in actual fact it was the fleet that needed the supplies most of all. He added as the Council had kept the population of the Cape in the dark regarding “His Majesty's friendly intention” they (the British)

⁶⁷ CA C231, Resolutiën, 22/6/1795, Dekker – Sluysken, 20/6/1795, pp.242-3.

⁶⁸ H.F. Nel, *Die Britse Verowering van die Kaap in 1795*, p.67.

⁶⁹ C231, Resolutiën, 21/6/1795, pp.200-32, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁷⁰ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone Journal, 20/6/1795, p.277.

⁷¹ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Sluysken, 21/6/1795, pp.283-4.

must appeal to them directly for the "Public Good".⁷² The Council answered that they had the right to employ their troops as they wish to and that they were ready and prepared to defend the Cape in the name of the Netherlands.⁷³ However, the next day the guards at the hospital were replaced and the supply process continued.⁷⁴ Clearly the action the Council took with the sword was not as sharp as the action they threatened with the pen.

The deadlock dragged on and as Elphinstone warned, their next step was to appeal directly to the population of the Cape by virtue of a proclamation (it was probably dated 21 June, but was circulated the next day). The proclamation painted a sombre picture of the situation in the Netherlands as the French had seized everything and the VOC "can no longer be said to exist". Everybody at the Cape was offered British protection, they were promised fair administration, free trade, no new taxes, prosperity and employment to the officials, while the people were invited to send a committee to confer with the British commanders.⁷⁵ Elphinstone also sent a copy of the proclamation to Gordon, requesting that he convey its contents to his troops. Gordon refused and was praised for it by the Council. Sluysken stated that they were completely convinced of Gordon's dedication to the defence of the Cape: "volkoomen verzeekerd houden van den ijver van gemelde Heer Hoofdofficier, zo wel tot het meede verdedigen van deeze Colonie als het bewaaren van dezelve voor haare wettige Souverain en de handhaaving der wettige constitutie van het vaderland die elk bezwooren heeft".⁷⁶ But Sluysken was obviously concerned. He expressed his sadness about the fact that everybody did not stand together to defend their country to Landdrost Faure of Swellendam and again appealed for urgent assistance.

Sluysken and the Council of Policy were very perturbed about the British proclamation and eventually decided (against Gordon's advice) to break off all negotiations with the British. Brandt was told to increase the security measures in False Bay and Simon's Bay, that the British should be seen as enemies and that their ships must receive no further supplies. In order to ensure that the British had no draught animals, Brandt had to see that all horses, oxen and other draught animals from Simon's Bay and Fish Hoek were removed. In case of a British attack, Simon's Town had to be defended, mainly from the *Zoutman* Battery and, if overpowered by the

⁷² C231, Resolutiën, 21/6/1795, Elphinstone – Sluysken, 21/6/1795, pp.200-32, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁷³ C231, Resolutiën, 21/6/1795 and 22/6/1795, pp.220-50, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁷⁴ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Sluysken, 23/6/1795, p.286.

⁷⁵ *Keith Papers*, I, Proclamation (not dated, probably 21 June), pp.278-82.

⁷⁶ C231, Resolutiën, 22/6/1795, pp.232-50, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

British, all gunpowder was to be dumped in the sea, guns spiked and everybody should withdraw to Muizenberg.⁷⁷

Brandt notified Elphinstone on 26 June that they would not provision the British force any longer. Elphinstone asked permission for the sick to stay ashore, which was granted. Brandt stated that they would be taken care of when the British sailed, but Elphinstone remarked that they “had no intention to depart”.⁷⁸ The two British commanders realised that a “state of hostility” now existed with the Dutch, yet, they still believed that Gordon would not influence his troops against them: “We have every reason to expect that Coll. Gordon's corps is well inclined to us”, Elphinstone and Craig reported to Henry Dundas, “indeed we have grounds for hoping that they would join us as soon as we land” but the artillery would “remain firm to their present rulers”.⁷⁹

On 26 June the EEIC ship *Orpheus* arrived from St Helena Island with John Pringle onboard. Pringle was just as perturbed about the supplies being stopped, since he thought the Dutch would simply, in the Stadtholder's name, accept the task force. To the EEIC Directors he blamed it on the independence ideas of a number of “... ignorant & credulous Boers”, the “obstacle to our success”.⁸⁰ John Pringle, the EEIC representative at the Cape, went to St Helena Island in April 1795, but when the *Arniston* arrived with news of the Elphinstone expedition, he immediately returned. Governor Brooke of St Helena Island recommended his services strongly to Elphinstone and introduced him as the “Agent of the Secret Committee” of the Directors of the EEIC (not just an EEIC agent as is usually stated). Brooke emphasised that Pringle had good knowledge and understanding of the EEIC objectives and their “resources”,⁸¹ while he had had much local knowledge as he was at the Cape for a year. Pringle's true status is an indication of the value afforded to the Cape before plans were finalised to capture the Cape and also explains why his opinion was generally regarded. Elphinstone was very pleased when Pringle arrived and requested him to stay with the task force for the duration of the expedition. He also had much praise for the valuable information Pringle provided on the Cape and its people.⁸²

On Sunday 28 June two American ships arrived in Simon's Bay from the Netherlands with mail and official papers. The British guarded the ships closely, boarded them and on the

⁷⁷ H.F. Nel, *Die Britse verowering van die Kaap in 1795*, p.66

⁷⁸ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone Journal, 26/6/1795, pp.292-3.

⁷⁹ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Elphinstone and Craig – Dundas, 27/6/1795, p.82.

⁸⁰ M. Arkin, *John Company at the Cape*, Pringle – Secret Committee, 27/06/1795, p.192.

⁸¹ *Keith Papers*, I, Brooke – Elphinstone, 4/6/1795, pp.254-5.

Columbia they found official despatches and mail for Sluysken, which they immediately confiscated.⁸³ Elphinstone explained to Dundas that these papers, "from the representatives of the French people in the Hague", were confiscated "without violence" and some documents, like the orders from the States-General (dated 10 February 1795), were of "a dangerous and inflammatory nature" as it notified the Cape authorities that hostilities with France ended and ordered them to organise the defence of the Cape against a possible British attack.⁸⁴ They were also ordered to seize all British property until further notice and the officials at the Cape would be responsible of negligence if anything unfortunate should happen.

A newspaper did elude the British. In it a notice was published to the effect that the States-General released all Dutch, at home and abroad, from their oath of allegiance to the Prince of Orange. It was also clear from mail some of the burghers received, that the Stadtholdership was abolished, and that the French were regarded as Dutch allies.⁸⁵

On the same day Elphinstone also proclaimed that the three VOC ships in Simon's Bay, (*Willemstadt en Boetzelaar*, *De Jonge Bonifcius* and *Geertruyda*) were "not to move from this place".⁸⁶ Obviously the Council was very upset. Stopping the Dutch ships was a "daad van openbaare vyandelykheid, welke kleur de Engelschen daaraan ook mogten geeven..." and they ordered the Dutch captains to sail to the Cape, as they were not under the command of the British and were at a Dutch anchorage. Brandt protested to the British and was told to open fire if the British prevented the ships from sailing.⁸⁷ Elphinstone explained to Sluysken that he did not officially seize the ships, but protected them from the French and just detained them "until it shall be determined to whom they legally belong".⁸⁸ As the Dutch were preparing red-hot-shot, Elphinstone thought hostilities might break out at any moment. He ordered two ships of the line (the *Stately* and the *Arrogant*) to anchor opposite the batteries, while the troops had to be ready to go ashore.⁸⁹ The Dutch Captains did not sail and nine days later British sailors boarded and seized their ships.⁹⁰

⁸² NAUK WO1/323, Cape of Good Hope, Elphinstone – Dundas, 3/7/1795, p.437; and *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone Journal, 26/6/1795, pp.292-3.

⁸³ CA VC68, Brieven en Bylagen van den Commissaris A.J. Sluysken, 29/6/1795, pp.754-5. NAUK ADM50/64, Admirals Journals, Vice Admiral Elphinstone, *Monarch*, see 28/6/1795; and ADM51/1136, Journal of the Proceedings Commodore Blankett, see 28/6/1795.

⁸⁴ NAUK WO1/323, Cape of Good Hope, Elphinstone – Dundas, 3/7/1795, pp.431-4.

⁸⁵ H.F. Nel, *Die Britse verowering van die Kaap in 1795*, pp.70-1.

⁸⁶ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Proclamation by Elphinstone, 28/6/1795, p.90.

⁸⁷ C231, Resolutiën, 29/6/1795, pp.317-32, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁸⁸ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Sluysken, 30/6/1795, pp.312-2.

⁸⁹ NAUK WO1/323, Cape of Good Hope, Elphinstone – Dundas, 3/7/1795, pp.436 and 438.

⁹⁰ C.J. de Villiers, *Die Britse Vloot aan die Kaap*, p.10.

From the evaluation Captain Dekker of the *Medemblik* made of the British force, Sluysken deduced that the Simon's Town garrison and fortifications would not be able to prevent a British landing. The only battery that could be used was the *Zoutman*, but it was armed with only four 24-pounders – obviously no match for the 74-gunned Royal Navy warships renowned for their crack gunnery. On the advice of Gordon and De Lille, the Council decided on 29 June to evacuate Simon's Bay.⁹¹ The embargo placed on the Danish ship *Emelia* was lifted and she received her rudder back. During the night the guns on the *Boetzelaar Battery* were spiked, ammunition was thrown into the sea, Brandt removed or destroyed all provisions (like flour, rice, meat, ham, wine, brandy and vinegar) that could be of any use to the British, while the troops went to Muizenberg. Only Brandt and a few men stayed behind to man the *Zoutman Battery*, but if they were attacked or were forced to withdraw, the guns on the battery had to be spiked.

Elphinstone and Craig in the meantime continued with the psychological war, spread misinformation and tried to bluff their opponents about the true state of affairs. A very good example of this is the long letter they wrote to Sluysken and the Council of Policy on 29 June, which Owen delivered to the Cape two days later.⁹² First, they played politics, stating as the Cape authorities showed “abhorrence of all Jacobinical principals”, and were “determined to defend the Colony against the forces of the French Convention”, the British came to provide assistance as their objective was to save the Cape “from the misery consequent on such an event as the French getting possession of the Settlement, best it is not equally true Gentlemen that we have given You any room to assert, that, we think ourselves entitled to take the Colony for our Sovereign”.⁹³ As the Dutch and British were “ancient friends” they wanted to defend the Cape against a common enemy and they therefore absolved the Cape population from their previous oath and stated that they must assist the British to defend the Cape for their lawful sovereign. They also wrote that the French had an occupation army of 120000 men in the Netherlands, that Dutch officers and men were discharged from the navy, while Dutch warships had French crews. It is obvious that they could not provide information about the true state of affairs in the Netherlands, as in truth they came to conquer the Cape, not to defend it!

The British commanders continued that they offered the Cape a “blessing”, the protection of the “mild and equitable dominion of Britain,” while the population will have access to British trade and markets, the troops will receive better pay and the officials will have certain

⁹¹ C231, Resolutiën, 29/6/1795, pp.317-32, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁹² *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone and Craig – Sluysken and Council, 29/6/1795 and Elphinstone Journal, 1/7/1795, pp.303-0 and 313.

⁹³ C231, Resolutiën, 2/7/1795, pp.350-81, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

employment as the VOC could no longer afford them.⁹⁴ It is obvious that they were well aware of the economic conditions at the Cape and focussed on it in an effort to sway public opinion.

Regarding the “Stoppage of those Supplies and provisions“, the British commanders told the Council that fresh provisions were specifically of value to the “few sick” they had, as “the Squadron is in no want of provisions“, but as provisions were denied, they were making enemies of somebody who were not the enemy.⁹⁵ This was incorrect on both accounts. The British came to capture the Cape and were now an enemy of the Netherlands. The squadron already experienced a shortage of provisions: on 1 July Elphinstone wrote in his journal: “Put the squadron on $\frac{3}{4}$ allowance ... excepting peas and outmeal”.⁹⁶

Elphinstone and Craig then tried to discredit support for the French and the revolution by dwelling on the fear factor, the race issue and slavery. They suggested that the principles of the French Revolution (liberty, equality and fraternity) provided for the “Universal freedom and rights of man among your Slaves” and emphasised that it had caused destruction in numerous West Indian islands as peaceful inhabitants were forced from their homes and families had to meet the Guillotine. French commerce had failed, while in contrast the British offered peace, security, trade, prosperity and the opportunity for the Cape to be returned to the Netherlands.⁹⁷

Though the letter from the two British commanders played on economic and political sensitivities, the Council decided not to change their stand. They reiterated their commitment to defend the Cape against any enemy and broke off all communications with the British. As Brandt had also complained about the British warships opposite the *Zoutman Battery*, which was useless to defend the bay against such an overwhelming force, while it could also be taken from behind, the Council decided on 2 July that the guns must be spiked, the ammunition destroyed and the few men in Simon’s Bay had to retreat to Muizenberg.⁹⁸ Only Brandt’s assistant, J.H. Brandt, and some slaves with personal supplies stayed behind. On 3 July Elphinstone reported in his Journal: “The battery on shore deserted ... guns spiked, but very imperfectly”.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone Journal, 1/7/1795, p.313.

⁹⁷ C231, Resolutiën, 2/7/1795, pp.350-81, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone Journal, 3/7/1795, p.313.

3. THE PREPARATIONS OF THE OPPOSING FORCES

By the end of June the Council of Policy realised that their only real alternative was to fight. A number of promotions and appointments were made in the infantry and artillery, while Gordon had to brief the Council on some of the defensive plans written during the previous war and thereafter.¹⁰⁰ Muizenberg was now the main position of the Cape defenders, but it was an excellent position to defend. One glance at a contemporary map of the Cape Peninsula makes it clear that the Dutch had a natural defensive position. The road from Simon's Bay along the sea was narrow and difficult to pass, as it had the sea on the one side and the mountain on the other. At Muizenberg the road was effectively blocked by an entrenchment, while the narrow pass to the interior had the high face of the *Steenberg* Mountain on the one side (west) and the Sandvlei marshes on the other side. To flank the Dutch position was therefore virtually impossible.

Muizenberg had a signal station and a few mortars to control the strategically important road between Simon's Town and the Cape. Captain Pieter de Waal with 84 Cape militiamen, 30 gunners and three small field pieces secured the position at the time of the British arrival. When the burgher reinforcements arrived at the Cape, a further 200 burger cavalymen were despatched to reinforce the Muizenberg position.¹⁰¹ The general feeling of the men at Muizenberg was that the pass could be held by a resolute defender and to improve its defences, an additional 100 spades and six pick-axes arrived. The palisade was also improved and by 30 June 1795, the VOC had 258 men at Muizenberg (excluding the burgher commando). It was later reinforced with more men and some artillery pieces.¹⁰²

To the Dutch, a landward attack from the direction of Simon's Town was the major threat, but as Gordon performed much construction work on the fortifications around Cape Town, there were not many guns to spare for the Muizenberg position. On the insistence of the burghers the position was hurriedly improved and Thibault had to construct breastworks with two batteries for the guns that were there. The breastworks faced landward and not seaward.¹⁰³ Thibault was certain that Muizenberg was well secured against a land attack as he had shut off the pass at "its narrowest point by reducing it to the passage of a single vehicle". Yet, as a military engineer, he had no illusions about the inadequacies of the fortifications at Muizenberg as they would not "..."

¹⁰⁰ C231, Resolutiën, 29/6/1795, pp.251-56, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁰¹ C231, Resolutiën, 22/6/1795, pp.232-50, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹⁰² D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, p.347.

hold out for long if attacked from the sea".¹⁰⁴ To really secure the position therefore required protection on the seaward side.

By 1 July the Dutch had one howitzer and a 6-pounder field gun in front of the Muizenberg position, on the two batteries were a howitzer, a 6-pounder field gun (placed at right angles to the shore and the coast road to guard the approach from Simon's Bay) and three 4-pounders. Three more field pieces (4-pounders) were inside the position to cover a retreat. To defend the road, the advance post at Kalk Bay had two 8-pounders.¹⁰⁵ Sluysken also ordered that Muizenberg must be defended against an attack from behind, and 16 picket posts were established in the mountains between Simon's Town and Muizenberg.¹⁰⁶

After Thibault was ordered to improve the entrenchment at Muizenberg, Gordon apparently with a sarcastic laugh remarked to him; "Give them entrenchments up to the chin, since they want them, but the English are too much our friends to cause us the least fear".¹⁰⁷ Though Thibault's record is often emotional and openly prejudiced, it is an indicator of the views held by patriot-minded, anti-British, individuals.

De Lille was now in charge of the Muizenberg position. He was "a devoted adherent of the Orange Party, and regarded the English as supporters of the Orange cause".¹⁰⁸ He and Gordon were also good friends and confidants, as De Lille was the godfather of Gordon's youngest son and the boy was named after De Lille.¹⁰⁹ In a very subjective pamphlet (published in 1796 in the Netherlands), he is described by a contemporary as the "lafste, gemeenste en liederlijkste kerel die men maar bedenken kan".¹¹⁰ This is too harsh, but the chance of De Lille putting up tough resistance against the British, was limited.

As the relationship with the British worsened, the Landdrost in Stellenbosch was ordered to send all the Khoi and persons of mixed blood available in his district, for military service to Muizenberg.¹¹¹ Extra recruits were received from Baviaanskloof and Graaff-Reinet. By the end of June, 138 *pandoers* were guarding the mountains around Muizenberg and they also had to make sure that no supplies reach the British. On 26 June Johan (Jan) Gerhard Cloete, a

¹⁰³ P.W. Marnitz, *The Dutch Surrender of the Cape of Good Hope, 1795*, pp.22 and 28.

¹⁰⁴ H. R. de Puyfontaine, *Louis Michel Thibault, 1750-1815*, p.8.

¹⁰⁵ P.W. Marnitz, *The Dutch Surrender of the Cape of Good Hope, 1795*, pp.22 and 28.

¹⁰⁶ A.J. Sluysken, *Verbaal gehouden by den Commissaris van de Caap De Goede Hoop*, p.136.

¹⁰⁷ H. R. de Puyfontaine, *Louis Michel Thibault, 1750-1815*, p.6.

¹⁰⁸ G.M. Theal, *History of Africa South of the Zambesi*, III, p.335.

¹⁰⁹ C.J. Barnard, Robert Jacob Gordon, p.283.

¹¹⁰ G.J. Schutte, 'Een Vergeten Pamflet: de Apologie van R.J. Gordon' in *Historia*, p.104.

¹¹¹ CA C231, Resolusies, 18/6/1795, p.189.

burgher militia officer, was appointed as “Capitein der Hottentotten”, while Joël Daniël Herold was appointed as Cornet and became the second-in-command.¹¹²

Elphinstone was still perturbed about the fact that animals were driven away, the supplies destroyed and all the vegetables from the Company Garden in Simon’s Town were taken away. He offered to buy the vegetables, but Brandt declined. Elphinstone also seemed contemptuous of the “pompous preparations” the Dutch made at Simon’s Bay as he could not believe that they would leave the Bay with all its facilities just like that. As he suspected a stratagem he warned Brandt, stating: “I despise subterfuge and when it becomes my duty to make war, I will not do it by halves”.¹¹³

Relations were now very strained and when some of the *pandoers* went to Simon’s Town on 11 July to retrieve personal property, five or six of them were taken by the British.¹¹⁴ They were released the following day but received payment from the British, were asked to join British service and one of them was appointed as a British spy.¹¹⁵ Elphinstone warned Brandt that the forces at Muizenberg should not send out armed reconnaissance parties to Simon’s Town as the British would shoot them.¹¹⁶ On 12 July all VOC personnel withdrew from Simon’s Town. Two days later Craig landed with roughly 800 men, part of the 78th Regiment (about 450 men) and marines (about 350 men) in a deserted Simon’s Town, while he established his headquarters in the house of the VOC Resident.¹¹⁷ On 15 July the 78th Regiment took possession of the batteries.¹¹⁸ Two days later Craig complained that the weather was bad for the poorly equipped soldiers ashore and Elphinstone provided them with the hammocks and bedding the navy issued to them onboard the ships.¹¹⁹

Fish Hoek now became a border. A small British patrol under Captain Campbell was apprehended by a few burgher cavalymen and *pandoers* (the British reported sixty, but such big burgher cavalry patrols are doubted) on 16 July. They maintained that they were looking for deserters and were let go. Sluysken ordered that in similar cases they must fire at the British soldiers or take them prisoner.¹²⁰ In the British version, Craig reported to Elphinstone that the

¹¹² J. de Villiers, *Hottentot-regimente aan die Kaap*, pp.39-42.

¹¹³ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Brandt, 6/7/1795, pp.323-4.

¹¹⁴ C231, *Resolutiën (Secreet)*, 12/7/1795, Brandt – Sluysken, pp.439-51, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹¹⁵ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone Journal, 11/7/1795 and 12/7/1795, p.332.

¹¹⁶ C231, *Resolutiën (Secreet)*, 12/7/1795, Brandt – Sluysken, pp.439-51, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹¹⁷ CA BO146, Letter Book, Craig – Dundas, 21/9/1795, p.30; and D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte*, p.336.

¹¹⁸ ADM50/64, Admirals Journals, Vice Admiral Elphinstone, *Monarch*, see 15/7/1795.

¹¹⁹ BL MS344/2, Craig – Elphinstone, 17/7/1795.

¹²⁰ CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de Overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, pp.92-7.

burghers “behaved rather more daringly than I should have expected” and they tried to seize the British patrol, however some British infantry came up from behind and they withdrew.¹²¹

In the meantime the *Echo* and the *Rattlesnake* constantly patrolled and blockaded the Cape waters as Sluysken complained that Table Bay was “continueel geblokkeerd ... door twee kruisende fregatten”.¹²² This prevented Sluysken from despatching the Dutch packet in Table Bay with news from the Cape to the High Council of the Indies. However, a cutter belonging to the Van Reenen brothers was at anchor in Saldanha Bay. As the bay was not constantly blockaded, the VOC rented the cutter and Lieutenant P. Woutersz (with six sailors) sailed at midnight on 14 July 1795, with news about the arrival of the British fleet and of the letter of the Prince of Orange, to Batavia. This was probably the last voyage to depart from the Cape under the VOC flag.¹²³

It was apparent to the British for quite some time that they would have to fight soon, but how and where to attack? Negotiations had failed, Simon's Town was evacuated and their food was in such short supply that rations were cut by a third. To top it all, their military force was inadequate; they had no transport, nor the equipment, heavy weapons or ammunition to undertake a siege, while Cape Town was well defended by fortifications. Due to his experience in operations connected to the capture of Charleston, Elphinstone was also well aware of the precarious nature of amphibious operations and the defensive strength of good fortifications. When ships of the Royal Navy attacked Fort Moultrie close to Charleston in 1776, they were repulsed in one of the bloodiest recorded battles between ships and forts. The action lasted 13 hours; the fort suffered 37 casualties, while the *HMS Bristol* alone had 111 casualties out of a crew of 350. The important lesson of this action, was that fire from good defensive positions, was very dangerous to warships.¹²⁴

Despite its frequency, amphibious operations actually had a dismal record during the eighteenth century. The obstacles amphibious warfare encountered were in essence the technical and supply problems so typical to eighteenth century warfare. Operations lacked continued fire-power and specialised vessels and equipment a later age would provide. The professional knowledge of the period dictated if an attacking fleet arrived at the landing site and did not go over to the attack immediately, the landing beaches and its approaching water had to be surveyed and, if possible, reconnaissance missions must be conducted to gain more intelligence. The Army and Navy commanders then had to meet regularly and do their

¹²¹ BL MS344/1, Craig – Elphinstone, 16/7/1795.

¹²² CA VC65, Brieven en Bylagen van den Commissaris, A.J. Sluysken, 7/7/1795, p.17.

¹²³ C. Beyers, *Die Kaapse Patriotte*, p.369.

operational planning. The rest of their officers must be informed about all aspects of the operation and their role in it.¹²⁵ Landings were slow, as it was difficult to ship and disembark soldiers, weapons, equipment and provisions. Adequate intelligence about enemy defences and navigational knowledge were often lacking coupled with a shortage of transport ships.¹²⁶ The attacker was thus exceptionally vulnerable during the attempted landing and to create a beachhead was operationally the most crucial stage. The army commander dictated the operations ashore, while the warships provided naval gunfire support, which in theory could be very effective due to the large number of guns warships carried. But landings were logistically reliant on the Navy who had to supply the soldiers ashore, as General Sir John Ligonier wrote in 1757, it was crucial to have a “safe and well secured Communication between the Camp and Sea, from whence you are to receive your Supplies of all Kinds”.¹²⁷ However, a key element was good co-operation between the Navy and the Army as Vice-Admiral Sir Charles Saunders poignantly highlighted in a despatch to the Admiralty on Quebec in 1759: “... during this tedious campaign, there has continued a perfect good understanding between the army and Navy”.¹²⁸ So how well did Elphinstone and Craig do, did they adhere to the established operational principles of the period?

As the British commanders knew the Cape had to be taken by force they were very anxious about General Clarke’s force, because until it arrived, their force was inadequate.¹²⁹ Though it would have been difficult to hold Simon’s Town against a concerted amphibious attack, its evacuation was a blessing to the British and the lack of proper defences a grave military error on the side of the Dutch. Operationally the most crucial stage, the creation of a beachhead, was easily obtained at Simon’s Town. The British now not only had a foothold ashore, but also a secure anchorage at which they could conduct urgent repairs and from where they could control the surrounding seas. Through their numerous visits to the Cape, British officers also obtained good intelligence about the Cape defences and topography. The British commanders now prepared for the land campaign and Blankett reported that their seamen were doing “small arms training” ashore – no doubt to bolster the small number of soldiers available.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ A.T. Mahan, *Types of Naval Officers Drawn from the History of the British Navy*, pp.vi-vii and 387.

¹²⁵ S. Foster, *Hit the Beach*, p.13.

¹²⁶ J. Black, *Eighteenth Century Europe, 1700-1789*, p.324.

¹²⁷ This quote from Ligonier is in S. Foster, *Hit the Beach*, p.15.

¹²⁸ This quote from Saunders is in S. Foster, *Hit the Beach*, p.20.

¹²⁹ BL MS344/1, Craig – Elphinstone, 16/7/1795.

¹³⁰ NAUK ADM51/1136, Journal of the Proceedings Commodore Blankett, see July 1795.

Elphinstone had problems with his health and often complained about it from his damp great cabin onboard the *Monarch*. Despite it, he never failed to perform his duty or to take command decisions, as he had constant interaction with Craig.¹³¹ The British continued their propaganda campaign and offered the VOC mercenaries increased pay if they joined the British. This resulted in 23 of them changing sides in less than two weeks. Desertions continued until two deserters were caught by a burgher patrol and were fusilladed.¹³² Craig learned from a deserter on 21 July that De Lille was in command at Muizenberg and that many of the “country burghers” were deployed at Muizenberg. As a result he asked Elphinstone to make more of the marines and seamen from the *Rattlesnake* available to undergo military training ashore.¹³³

The Dutch never used the opportunity to attack the British position at Simon’s Bay, or to make their foothold difficult. With good knowledge of the terrain and the advantage of cavalry, they could have done much, as cavalry were ideal for raiding operations. When Craig received information from a “free black” on 25 July that the Dutch planned to launch an attack on the British within three days, he thought it was just talk, but nonetheless asked Elphinstone to put the ammunition of the 78th Regiment ashore.¹³⁴

As only 70 men answered the call-up instructions from Swellendam, Sluysken tried to get more assistance from the districts, which was difficult due to situation in the interior. He knew he could not salvage the situation in Swellendam and Graaff-Reinet and decided to let it be (“aan zich zelven over te laten”) until after the departure of the British.¹³⁵ After he again requested assistance from the outlying districts, he received notice from Landdrost Faure of Swellendam on 18 July that a contingent was on its way to assist¹³⁶ and on 26 July more burghers from Swellendam under their Commandant, Petrus Jacobus Delpont, arrived at the Cape.¹³⁷ Presumptuously Delpont warned Elphinstone in a letter that the British should rather leave, as they were prepared to put up a fight and would not just hand over the Cape: “wy nog goede Schutters in ons Land hebbe die haare Vyand wel durve in de ooge zien!”¹³⁸ It is not clear what Elphinstone made of this “warning”.

¹³¹ BL MS344/1, Craig – Elphinstone, 16/7/1795.

¹³² H.F. Nel, *Die Britse Verowering van die Kaap in 1795*, p.80.

¹³³ BL MS344/4, Craig – Elphinstone, 21/7/1795.

¹³⁴ BL MS344/7, Craig – Elphinstone, 25/7/1795.

¹³⁵ ‘Decreeten der Nationale Vergadering Repreenteerende het Volk van Nederland’, The Hague, 1796, copied in C. Beyers, *Die Kaapse Patriotte*, pp.370-2.

¹³⁶ C231, Resolutiën, 18/7/1795, pp.452-456, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

¹³⁷ CA C2671, Burgherbesware en Kommissies van Onderzoek, Rapport over den Commissaris Sluysken, 21/10/1795, p.114.

¹³⁸ C. Beyers, *Kaapse Patriotte*, Delpont – Elphinstone, 10/7/1795, p.255.

After British boats took soundings well within range from the Dutch guns at Muizenberg, a Dutch officer, Captain Van Veerden, surveyed the coast off Muizenberg and stated that British warships would be able to approach to well within the range of their guns. On the insistence of the burghers, at the end of July two 24-pounder guns were taken to Muizenberg and placed at the seaward extremity of the position.¹³⁹ By the beginning of August, the Muizenberg defences consisted of a 50m long entrenchment across the road to Simon's Town, with a mortar and a 6-pounder gun on the seaward side and two 4-pounders at the other end. Further back was a battery with two 4-pounders, while the two 24-pounders that were close to the beach, were not properly mounted. According to Marnitz, nature needed help and in order to improve their position, he and most officers considered the placing of batteries and breastworks on the seaward side an important necessity.¹⁴⁰ With stubborn resistance and good preparations on the Dutch side and the lack of proper transport and siege weapons on the British side, it would have been very difficult to force the Dutch from the Muizenberg position.

From a military point of view the British appreciation – specifically the Elphinstone and Craig correspondence that relates to their strategy, campaign planning and tactics – is informative. The two commanders tackled the issues pragmatically, while they had a clear grasp of the military feasibility and dangers linked to the various options. Dutch documents on defence matters, on the other hand, were clouded with political issues and uncertainty and reflected the general troubled mood so typical of the last days of the VOC era at the Cape.

Craig was certain that the only real solution was to capture Muizenberg. From the middle of July onwards he and Elphinstone planned how to assault the Muizenberg position and force the Dutch from it. In the tradition of the classical military theory and in conception reminiscent of Julius Caesar's Illerda campaign,¹⁴¹ they at one stage even considered a large strategic turning movement via Constantia. The reasoning was that it would threaten the Dutch rear and cut off their communications, which would compel them to abandon Muizenberg. If such an attack failed, Craig thought he could retreat across the mountains at Constantia.¹⁴² It was a fanciful manoeuvre that posed massive challenges and would be very difficult to execute in the rugged terrain of the Steenberg Mountains because the element of surprise was crucial for

¹³⁹ P.W. Marnitz, *The Dutch Surrender of the Cape of Good Hope, 1795*, p.28.

¹⁴⁰ CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de Oorgave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, pp.68-72.

¹⁴¹ At Illerda in Spain in 49BC Caesar impelled Pompeii's force to surrender without a fight, when he conducted a large strategic turning movement which threatened their rear, blocked their retreat and cut off their communications. As a result they had no option but to surrender. See A. Jones, *The Art of War in the Western World*, pp.75-80.

¹⁴² BL MS344/3, Craig – Elphinstone, 17/7/1795. See also *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Craig, 27/7/1795, p.339.

success, while soldiers would have to be very fit to execute it swiftly and they had to find trails over the mountain. The idea was discarded, yet it showed that they conceptually explored all options.

A direct assault on Muizenberg remained the best option. In the process, Craig emphasised, they had to endeavour to capture Dutch field artillery, camp equipment and “above all any horses or bullocks which they may have there, in order to supply our great deficiency”.¹⁴³ Though Craig took cognisance of Elphinstone’s warning that the shallow coastline and the uncertainty of the wind made it difficult for the Navy to support an advance, he still maintained, if the Army advanced from Simon’s Bay, the Navy would be essential to supply the troops and to provide gunfire support.¹⁴⁴

In the meantime the Navy prepared for an assault on the Muizenberg position and took soundings off Muizenberg to establish if it would be possible for the ships to approach to within three-quarters of a mile from the beach. Elphinstone was sceptical about the effectiveness of naval gunfire support because the long rolling swell would impact on the accuracy of his guns. He nevertheless reassured Craig that given the right weather conditions (preferably a westerly wind and a smooth sea), his ships would be on their post within two hours – a position, he referred to as the “Thermopylae of the Cape Peninsula”.¹⁴⁵

After analysing all the options, Craig prepared a military appreciation of the anticipated operation for Elphinstone. He motivated very strongly that the Dutch must be attacked and driven from Muizenberg as soon as the weather permitted and even before reinforcements from St Helena Island arrived. He thought it would not be too difficult and emphasised the value of artillery and the element of surprise. But as they had a shortage of artillery and draught animals they had to attempt to capture both. He discarded the idea of performing amphibious landings at Muizenberg and suggested that the battalions of sailors land in Simon’s Bay and march with the soldiers.¹⁴⁶ As Muizenberg was seven miles away, the ships could be in position within ninety minutes, while the troops would march at least two hours. Craig was convinced that the Dutch would not be able to stand against an attack from both the land and the sea.¹⁴⁷ He emphasised that the attack on Muizenberg was not purely a task for the army – when taking a position on the coast, naval gunfire support was the norm. Elphinstone assured Craig that if required, “two line of battleships and the sloops are ready to move at the shortest notice,” but he

¹⁴³ BL MS344/3, Craig – Elphinstone, 17/7/1795.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ C.J. de Villiers, *Die Britse Vloot aan die Kaap*, pp.11-2.

¹⁴⁶ BL MS344/8, Memorandum, Craig – Elphinstone, 25/7/1795.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

did not expect much in the line of fighting, since they had "...a raw enemy to deal with, that may be easily alarmed".¹⁴⁸

Training ashore in preparation for the attack on Muizenberg went well. Many of Craig's troops were raw recruits and even "young boys ... not a fourth part of either officers or men had seen any service before they came to the Cape".¹⁴⁹ The Army experienced some problems due to a shortage of ramrods, but with the assistance of the workshops onboard the ships, iron ramrods were made.¹⁵⁰ Though they also had a shortage of tents ashore, Elphinstone refused to cut up sails for tents as it would be too expensive and he had no way of replacing them.

Due to their shortage of provisions and the fact that burgher reinforcements arrived from the interior, the British decided to finalize plans for the Muizenberg attack by 26 July. Two battalions of seamen were disembarked, which increased the landed force to 1600. Even though they lacked equipment and soldiers, the British commanders were confident of their success because of the dissension at the Cape. They were moreover certain that the *Nationaal Bataillon* would not put up strong resistance and thought it might even change sides.

The British forces were ready for "the proposed attack" on 3 August, but according to Elphinstone the wind was too strong for the ships and the attack was cancelled. The same evening five burghers and some *pandoers* under the command of Jacobus van Reenen undertook an armed reconnaissance towards Simon's Bay, but ran into a British picket. Some fire was exchanged and one British sailor from the *Echo* was wounded. To Elphinstone's relief the *Orpheus* arrived back from St Helena Island on 5 August with supplies, £5000, two field guns and a 25cm howitzer.¹⁵¹ Now they just had to await good weather. On Thursday 6 August a British boat were surveying the area off Muizenberg when two shots were fired at them; one of the shots went over them while they were at six fathoms.¹⁵² This meant the Dutch had long range guns.

¹⁴⁸ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Craig, 27/7/1795, p.339.

¹⁴⁹ R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, p.308.

¹⁵⁰ BL MS344/9, Craig to Elphinstone, 27/7/1795; and *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Craig, 27/7/1795, p.339.

¹⁵¹ W.G. Perrin (ed), *Keith Papers*, I, p.222.

¹⁵² *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone Journal, 3/8/1795, pp.343-4.

4. THE BRITISH OFFENSIVE AND THE DUTCH DEFENCE OF THE CAPE

4.1. The British Assault on Muizenberg

The British attack on Muizenberg was the first time that the VOC had to defend the Cape against maritime power projection. De Jong and other military observers saw Muizenberg as a key position and thought an attack on the Cape would in all probability take place in False Bay. Both he and the Military Commission suggested that the defenders should make the advance of an enemy along the difficult road to Muizenberg hazardous by placing small batteries along it and using skirmishers.¹⁵³ When Dekker arrived in Batavia he reported to Nederburgh and Frijkenius (without knowledge of the events at the Cape) that he had warned the authorities at the Cape that Muizenberg would be the key in the defence of the Cape, if the British attacked. He assured them, if the British had acted belligerently while he was at the Cape, he would have used his sailors to reinforce the Muizenberg position.¹⁵⁴ As discussed, the British command was convinced of the value of the Muizenberg position and that it had to be taken. The Commanding Officer of the 78th Regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander McKenzie, wrote to Lord Seaforth that Muizenberg was the Dutch “strong-post”, the “great object of our wishes ... certainly strong by nature and art...”.¹⁵⁵ No doubt, the terrain favoured the Dutch.

Muizenberg favoured the defender, while good preparations and stubborn resistance would have made it very difficult to force the Dutch from Muizenberg, but Gordon did not agree to all the required improvements. When the British attacked, De Lille had only a portion of the Cape defenders available: roughly 200 infantrymen from the *Nationaal Bataillon*, 120 artillerymen, 300 mounted burghers and 150 *pandoers*.¹⁵⁶ Though burgher reinforcements had arrived from the interior, pushing their numbers to about 1140, most of them were at the camp in Cape Town.¹⁵⁷ The morale of the troops and burghers at Muizenberg was low, they were idle and bored, and did not trust Gordon and De Lille. Furthermore, they were furious at De Lille for not firing at the British while they took soundings off Muizenberg. On the evening before the British attack (6 August) De Lille and some of the officers apparently went on a drinking spree.

¹⁵³ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, I, pp.59-61.

¹⁵⁴ S. Dekker, ‘Relaas aan de Commissarisen Generaal over geheel Nederlands Indiën en Cabo de Goede Hoop...’ in S.C. Nederburgh, *Echte Stukken betreffende ...*, pp.97-8.

¹⁵⁵ W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa 1795-1895*, McKenzie – Seaforth, 9/8/1795, pp.7-8.

¹⁵⁶ CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, p.72.

When they were intoxicated, at around 23:00, they wanted to end their amusement with a general alarm and sent some of the soldiers on a fool's errand. During this incident one of the "unsteady" Dutch officers, F.R. Bresler, sprained his ankle in the ropes of a tent.¹⁵⁸

The next morning (7 August) the British commanders commenced with the serious business of making war. The Navy disembarked two battalions of seamen, about 800 men, for the attack on Muizenberg. Together with the 2nd Battalion of the 78th Regiment (450 men) and 350 Marines, the British force consisted of about 1600 men.¹⁵⁹ At midday, when it was clear that they had the westerly wind the Navy required, Elphinstone signalled to Craig that the attack could commence. Craig, Elphinstone reported, "with his accustomed readiness and activity", immediately marched up with his troops from Simon's Town.¹⁶⁰

Since the *Monarch* stayed in Simon's Bay, Elphinstone moved his flag to the *America* and at 12:30 they made sail with the *Stately*, *Echo* and *Rattlesnake* as well as the ships' launches of the *Monarch* and *Stately*, that were fitted out as gunboats. While the troops continued their advance ashore, the gunboats came close inshore, in the shallower water, to provide fire support and "kept ahead of troops as they marched".¹⁶¹ The Dutch piquet at Kalk Bay came under fire from the gunboats and the *America* (at 13:00), which forced them to quit their position twenty minutes later.

When the British troops approached Muizenberg they halted about a mile from the Dutch positions to wait for the warships.¹⁶² Elphinstone hoisted the signal to engage at 14:20. The smaller vessels anchored inshore at about 14:30, but the bigger ships found it difficult to get close as the wind became somewhat stronger.¹⁶³ They eventually anchored, with fore and aft anchors and springs on the anchor cables, to manoeuvre the ships into the correct firing position so that their full broadside could be brought to bear. By 15:00 the *America* was firing her full broadside, literally "thundering showers of shot upon the Camp".¹⁶⁴

After the British fire commenced, De Lille and his infantry fled in great confusion, followed by the burghers, *pandoers* and the majority of the artillerymen. They left everything behind and retreated to Sandvlei.¹⁶⁵ McKenzie added, as soon as the warships "opened a

¹⁵⁷ H.F. Nel, *Die Britse verowering van die Kaap*, pp.86-7.

¹⁵⁸ CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, p.72; and H. R. de Puyfontaine, *Louis Michel Thibault, 1750-1815*, p.9.

¹⁵⁹ W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa 1795-1895*, p.6.

¹⁶⁰ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Elphinstone – Dundas, 18/8/1795, p.114.

¹⁶¹ ADM50/64, Admirals Journals, Vice Admiral Elphinstone, *Monarch*, see 8/8/1795.

¹⁶² W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa*, McKenzie – Seaforth, 9/8/1795, p.7.

¹⁶³ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Elphinstone – Dundas, 18/8/1795, p.114.

¹⁶⁴ M. Boucher and N. Penn (eds), *Britain at the Cape*, Ross – Scott, 14/08/1795, p.43.

¹⁶⁵ P.W. Marnitz, *The Dutch Surrender of the Cape of Good Hope, 1795*, pp.30-2.

tremendous fire ... the astonished Burghers ... rode of as fast as they could collect their horses".¹⁶⁶ With their field guns and the lighter guns, the Dutch would have been able to considerably hamper the advance of an enemy in the narrow passage between the mountain and the sea at Muizenberg, if they really wished to conduct a proper defence.

Only a few gunners under the command of Lieutenants Marnitz and Kemper¹⁶⁷ conducted some sort of defence with the two 24-pounders. Blankett reported that when the British ships came within the range of the gun battery, the "enemy kept up a brisk fire".¹⁶⁸ But as the bellows of the Dutch artillery broke, they could not use red-hot-shot and had to fire cold cannonballs at the British.¹⁶⁹ Also their gun position was inadequate because it did not have a firm enough platform for the heavy 24-pounders; the wheels of the gun carriages were embedded in the sand and the guns had to be redirected after every salvo. The contact with the ships lasted about half an hour and after the bigger ships started firing their broadsides, Marnitz and his fellows were forced to retire. They spiked the 24-pounders and took the field artillery, with the exception of a 6-pounder and two howitzers. According to Marnitz these guns stayed behind because they could not get the draught animals together.¹⁷⁰

By 15:30 Elphinstone signalled "signal 61 to discontinue engaging". He wryly wrote in his Journal that by 16:15 *America* "hoisted the cornet, that the enemy had fled ... leaving their tents standing", while the *Stately* and *Rattlesnake* weighed anchors at 16:20 and returned to Simon's Bay.¹⁷¹ No doubt naval gunfire support had won the day at Muizenberg and encouraged the half-hearted defenders of Muizenberg to retreat, even before Craig could dislodge the defenders from their positions. Marnitz stated unequivocally that it was the gunfire from the ships that forced them to retreat: "door hun vuur ... deese voordeelige positie te verlaaten".¹⁷²

When the Dutch were round the mountain and out of range of the ships' guns, some artillerymen, burghers and *pandoers* made a stand. They organised a counterattack from Steenberg, while from Sandvlei Kemper's artillery also fired on the British van. It temporarily halted their advance, forced them to retreat to Muizenberg and consolidate by nightfall.¹⁷³ After a temporary halt at Sandvlei, De Lille in the meantime retreated to Lochner's Farm (at

¹⁶⁶ W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa*, McKenzie – Seaforth, 9/8/1795, p.8.

¹⁶⁷ H.F. Nel, *Die Britse verowering van die Kaap*, p.93.

¹⁶⁸ NAUK ADM51/1136, Journal of the Proceedings Commodore Blankett, see August 1795.

¹⁶⁹ CA VC65, Sluysken – High Council of the Indies (handwritten copy) 12/8/1795, p.50.

¹⁷⁰ CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, Verhaal van de overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop, p.303.

¹⁷¹ *The Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone Journal, 7/8/1795, p.344.

¹⁷² CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, Verhaal van de overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop, p.303.

¹⁷³ A.J. Sluysken, *Verbaal gehouden by den Commissaris van de Caap De Goede Hoop*, p.139.

Dieprivier). The flight of the Dutch defenders was even taunted in local folklore. In a poem, or a song, called the "Swellendamsche en Diverse Andere Helden by de Bloedige Actie aan Muizenberg", the lamented hero is Koos Delport. Though very brave against indigenous enemies, when he came into contact with the British force of arms, it was a different enemy. He and his comrades had met their match and they could not remove themselves from the scene quickly enough.¹⁷⁴

Casualties were slight all round. The Dutch had one burgher, two artillerymen and one *pandoer* wounded.¹⁷⁵ In Craig's force two men were killed and eight were wounded, including the severely wounded Captain Hercules Scott of the 78th Regiment.¹⁷⁶ Damage to the British squadron was slight: one gun was struck by shot and disabled on the *America*, while a number of shots "passed through the ships but did not materially injure them".¹⁷⁷ In terms of casualties *America* had two killed and three or four wounded, while on *Stately* one man was wounded. Marnitz and his companions seemed to have directed their fire at the ships of the line, while the smaller ships were not fired at.

Elphinstone afterwards had much praise for the actions of his officers and commended a number of them in person to Dundas. He remarked that he must "add that ... the *Echo's* fire was superiorly directed and ably kept up ... and particular acknowledgements are also due to the officers and men for the general zeal and activity which appeared in every countenance".¹⁷⁸

At Muizenberg Craig captured five guns that were left behind, two howitzers (one spiked), a 6-pounder and two heavy iron guns (both spiked), which they were able to quickly repair.¹⁷⁹ In addition they also took "some provisions"; a few sheep, four horses and 12 oxen.¹⁸⁰ The British were obviously astounded by the lack of enthusiasm displayed by the Dutch forces, as Percival, one of the British officers, remarked: "The Dutch on our approach neither behaved with courage or prudence, nor took a proper advantage of their strong positions ... and with a degree of folly scarcely to be accounted for ... abandoned the important place which they should have defended to the last extremity".¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁴ F. Duminy and J.M. Duminy, *Duminy Dagboeke*, p.331.

¹⁷⁵ G.M Theal, *History of Africa South of the Zambesi*, III, p.333.

¹⁷⁶ BL MS344/11, Craig – Elphinstone, 8/8/1795; and W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa*, McKenzie – Seaforth, 9/8/1795, p.8.

¹⁷⁷ NAUK ADM51/1136, Journal of the Proceedings Commodore Blankett, August 1795; and *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Dundas, 18/8/1795, p.353.

¹⁷⁸ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Dundas, 18/8/1795, p.353.

¹⁷⁹ BL MS344/11, Craig – Elphinstone, 8/8/1795.

¹⁸⁰ *Keith Papers*, I, Ross – Elphinstone, 8/8/1795, p.345.

¹⁸¹ R. Percival, *An Account of the Cape of Good Hope*, p.66.

Considering that Muizenberg was the main defensive position (for more than a month), the available time should have been utilized more effectively for its improvement. The 24-pounders were not even properly mounted, which is an indication that organising a proper defence of the Cape was a low priority to the authorities. Marnitz stated that much unhappiness existed amongst the burghers about the poor defence of Muizenberg. If the British attack took place later they might not have taken Muizenberg, as the burghers would have compelled Sluysken to deploy more heavy artillery at Muizenberg, and build a proper battery there.¹⁸²

Perhaps the most telling is a remark Percival afterwards made. The natural defensive position at Muizenberg struck them “with wonder at its strength” and they reflected “with a mixture of surprise and contempt on the Dutch troops who allowed ours so easily to take possession of it, while it is so exceedingly strong that a very few men with field pieces might defend it without any risqué to themselves, and arrest the progress of a whole army”.¹⁸³

4.2. The Dutch Retreat to Wynberg

Gordon was not present during the action at Muizenberg, but he and Sluysken appeared at Lochner's farm that evening. Since there was great discontent amongst the burghers De Lille was ordered to take up a defensive position behind Sandvlei. At Sandvlei De Lille placed his infantry in the middle, the artillery in front of the line and the burghers and *pandoers* on the flanks. Most of the infantry were deployed in the dunes to the east of the Sandvlei, while the cavalry from Stellenbosch and Swellendam (under Captains Myburgh and Cloete), 50 infantrymen under Captain Kibourg and 36 gunners with two field guns, had to prevent a flanking movement from the Steenberg.¹⁸⁴

On 8 August Craig wrote to Elphinstone that the Dutch deployment was “certainly indicating an intention to attack”, but he was not worried, as it was not good ground, and the Dutch could not attack without more artillery and artillerymen.¹⁸⁵ During the morning Craig resumed his advance in two columns, sending the seamen through Sandvlei and the infantry

¹⁸² P.W. Marnitz, *The Dutch Surrender of the Cape of Good Hope, 1795*, pp.59-61.

¹⁸³ R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, p.64.

¹⁸⁴ CA VC76, H.D. Campagne, *Memorie en Bijzonderheden wegens overgawe der Kaap*, pp.52-55; CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de Oorgave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, pp.143-4; and C.L. Neethling, *Onderzoek van't verbaal van A.J. Sluysken, voormalige commissaris van Cabo de Goede Hoop, en verdediging van't gedrag der Caapsche burghery*, pp.50 and 57-60.

¹⁸⁵ BL MS344/11, Craig – Elphinstone, 8/8/1795.

along the Steenberg. When De Lille saw the advancing British soldiers and sailors approaching through the water, he retreated without firing a shot.¹⁸⁶

Some of the *pandoers* and the burgher cavalry did not retreat and surprised the British infantry with a counterattack on their flank. This caused the British to leave some of their baggage behind and retreat to Muizenberg through the Sandvlei. They were pursued by burghers and *pandoers*, but the counterattack was checked by fire from the guns which the Dutch abandoned the previous day.¹⁸⁷ The burghers got no help from De Lille in their pursuit, since he was retreating in the opposite direction and pitched camp at Wynberg. Sluysken stated that he went to the front on 8 August but chaos ensued: “wanorde en verwarring waarin de Militairen zo wel als de Burghers bevonden”. Instead of marching towards Muizenberg, De Lille’s men were in retreat, “zonder den Vyand gezien te hebben of een enkel schot te hebben gedaan”.¹⁸⁸

De Lille explained that his decision to withdraw was based on rumours amongst the troops that the British had numerical advantage and two guns. According to one commentator it was probably De Lille himself who had spread these rumours which led to so much uncertainty and confusion amongst the troops that they fled in disorder to Wynberg.¹⁸⁹ Gordon, who was at the front on 8 August, made no attempt to calm his troops and approved the retreat to Wynberg, though he must have known that it was unjustified. Thibault recorded, or exaggerated, that from Wynberg Gordon “... returned to Cape Town, laughing like a madman”.¹⁹⁰

From these events and the fact that the Muizenberg defences were not improved upon, it seems that the defence of the Cape was sabotaged. Neither Sluysken, nor Gordon or De Lille made any significant effort to organise effective resistance before the withdrawal to Wynberg. Their actions, or lack thereof, could probably be best explained in view of their Orange sentiments. Two burghers, Keeve and Van Esch, compiled a charge portraying De Lille as a traitor (“verraaier”), which was signed by all the burgher Captains. On 10 October Sluysken ordered De Lille’s arrest, as in Sluysken’s words he “hebbende getoond gebrek aan Militaire talenten, aan welmeenendheid, of aan moed”.¹⁹¹ The unpopular Captain W. Buissine was

¹⁸⁶ C.L. Neethling, *Onderzoek van't verbaal van A.J. Sluysken*, pp.52-54.

¹⁸⁷ CA VC76, H.D. Campagne, *Memorie en Bijzonderheden wegens overgawe der Kaap*, pp.52-55; CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de Oorgawe van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, pp.143-4.

¹⁸⁸ ‘Decreeten der Nationale Vergadering Representerende het Volk van Nederland’, The Hague, 1796, copied in C. Beyers, *Die Kaapse Patriotte*, p.373.

¹⁸⁹ P. Cullinan, *Robert Jacob Gordon*, p.180.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ CA VC65, Sluysken – High Council of the Indies (handwritten copy) 12/8/1795, pp.59-60. See also the copy of ‘Decreeten der Nationale Vergadering Representerende het Volk van Nederland’, The Hague, 1796, in C. Beyers, *Die Kaapse Patriotte*, p.374.

appointed in his position on 11 August, but he was later replaced by Captain B.C. van Baalen, another Orangist. De Lille was then taken to the Castle. Though he was acquitted by the Fiscal, he was held in custody to ensure his safety!

While the British attacked Muizenberg, they were experiencing significant supply shortages, but some relief was on its way. After *HMS Sphynx* arrived at St Helena Island with a dispatch stating that negotiations had failed and that the force was inadequate to capture the Cape because it had no artillery, Governor Brooke assisted immediately and despatched reinforcements with the *Orpheus* (that arrived on 5 August) and the *Arniston*.¹⁹² When the *Arniston* arrived on 9 August with 398 soldiers (three infantry companies and an artillery company in the service of the EEIC), nine field guns and ammunition, supplies and a substantial amount of silver money (£10000) onboard, it was quite a relief.¹⁹³ Craig was glad to see the *Arniston*, because many sailors threw their haversacks away during the fighting and went hungry.¹⁹⁴ He requested Elphinstone to send him supplies and money and as his officers were miserably off, he also requested that their baggage be brought to Muizenberg.¹⁹⁵ Some of the money was probably soon used to pay a spy, as Elphinstone reported on 10 August: "received intelligence from the Cape by a spy".¹⁹⁶

4.3. An Unsteady Foothold: Waiting for British Reinforcements

Van Baalen (promoted to Major) was in charge of the Wynberg Camp. His defences were poorly organized, Wynberg was not fortified and little was done to improve the situation. He was severely criticized by the burghers and some of the artillery officers and when the burghers approached Van Baalen with suggestions on improving the defences, he complained that he had no authority. The defences were not inspected by Sluysken or Gordon and during the following month Gordon never visited Wynberg. Considering the extraordinary circumstances, as the *Hoofd der Militie*, it was imperative for Gordon to take over command or at least endeavour to fortify Wynberg against a certain British attack. However, he devoted much time and energy on improving batteries around Cape Town, especially the *Mouille Battery* – just in

¹⁹² W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa 1795-1895*, pp.10-1.

¹⁹³ W.G. Perrin (ed), *Keith Papers*, I, p.222; and Elphinstone Journal, 9/8/1795, p.345.

¹⁹⁴ BL MS344/12, Craig – Elphinstone, 9/8/1795.

¹⁹⁵ *Keith Papers*, I, Ross – Jackson, 9/8/1795, p. 346 and BL MS344/12, Craig – Elphinstone, 9/8/1795.

¹⁹⁶ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone Journal, 10/8/1795, p.346.

case the enemy decided to land there.¹⁹⁷ Sluysken also expressed concern about the defences, arguing that the Cape Peninsula was too big for their limited military capability, while warning against a simultaneous British assault from Table Bay and Muizenberg.¹⁹⁸ According to Marnitz the main reason for all of this was to keep the engineers busy around the Cape, so that they could not be used at Wynberg.¹⁹⁹ Time was thus spent on protection against a threat from the northwest, whilst the real threat was actually from the southeast.

Sluysken feared an attack in Table Bay and ordered the Robben Island convicts to the Cape. All the buildings on the island had to be set alight, the vegetable gardens destroyed, the wells filled and anything the enemy might use destroyed, to prevent it being used as a base. It seems that the order was never carried out, as at the end of August there were still four NCO's, 30 soldiers and about 123 convicts on the Island.²⁰⁰ If the authorities really believed in a threat from Table Bay, this would not have been the case.

Investigating the Dutch defensive strategy after the retreat to Wynberg, indicate that nothing changed. No mention can be made of a well-founded defensive plan or any significant effort to stop the Cape from falling into British hands. Since it was obvious that the British would soon renew their attack, the burghers were concerned about the defence of Wynberg and demanded a *burgherkrijgsraad* on 11 August, as they concluded that the Cape was not properly defended and the task now rested on their shoulders: "dat men niet voor had de colonie behoorlik te defendeeren, de geheele taak der verdediging op de schouders der burgeren rusten ...".²⁰¹ By order of Sluysken a public Council of War meeting (*krijgsraad*) was held at the *Burgerwaghuis* in Cape Town that evening. The hall was packed and the whole square was full of people, and in this electrifying atmosphere a revolt seemed possible. Sluysken shed tears during the meeting and pleaded with the population not to act precipitately. He said that they expected a landward attack from False Bay as well as an attack from the sea in Table Bay. He reiterated that the Cape would be defended to the last, and that everybody should act in unity.²⁰²

Though the British attack on Muizenberg was successful and two ships arrived from St Helena Island, their foothold was actually unsteady. Yet, Elphinstone and Craig maintained the psychological war and still tried to intimidate their opponent, as they probably wished to induce the Cape to accept their terms or to prevent a counterattack: in a letter to the Council of Policy

¹⁹⁷ CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, pp.350-7.
¹⁹⁸ CA C239, *Resolutiën (Secrete)*, 12/8/1795, pp.113-4; and C231, *Resolutiën*, 25/8/1795, pp.502-4.
¹⁹⁹ CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, pp.353-7.
²⁰⁰ D. Sleight, *Buiteposte*, pp.397-8.
²⁰¹ CA VC76, H.D. Campagne, *Memorie en bijzonderheden wegens overgave der Kaap*, p.73.
²⁰² H.F. Nel, *Die Britse Verowering van die Kaap in 1795*, p.108.

dated 12 August they again emphasised their friendship with the Dutch and stressed that they do not wish to fight, but as they were awaiting reinforcements of 3000 men, the Cape will be forced to surrender. If the Dutch did not take heed of this, they threatened that some men of passion “inflamed by the resistance and ill treatment” might act in an inappropriate way and they would not be responsible for what British troops might do to the population.²⁰³ The defenders of the Cape should therefore accept their terms – basically surrender.

Sluysken answered that they were committed to defend the Cape. They received the British as friends, provisioned them and took care of their sick, yet the proclamation of 22 June (actually 21 June) made it clear that they wished to capture the Cape for the British Crown. Even if France had invaded the Netherlands, the British had no right to take the Cape: “Syne Majesteit van Groot Brittanniën nog geen regt geeven, om de Colonie onder Syne gehoorzaamheid te willen brengen, of ons wettigen om afstand te doen van Eene Volkplanting aan onse bestiering en bewaaring toevertrouwd”.²⁰⁴ Sluysken warned the two British commanders to refrain from personal threats as posterity will judge them and their methods and show their lack of honesty: “dat wy aan een onpartydige Waereld en de Posteriteit overlaten, om Vonnis te vellen, over UWEd: openhartigheid, wanneer Sal onderregt Syn, van de middelen, die UWEd: gebruykt hebben, om ons van alle tydingen uit Europa en Indiën te versteeken, en om Sig Vyandig by Stappen aan de Colonie meester te maaken”.²⁰⁵ Some straight talking: there was no doubt about the British intentions.

With difficulty the British maintained the base at Muizenberg, as Elphinstone lamented, with much labour “we are endeavouring to establish a depot for provisions and ammunition so as to enable him (Craig) to advance, but the deep sands and want of cattle renders it difficult and fatiguing to feed the troops and protect the line of communication”.²⁰⁶ British provisions were getting seriously low. The *Echo* had returned from Saldanha Bay without any supplies as the farmers had driven their cattle into the interior when she arrived. On 27 August Elphinstone despatched the *Echo* to the False Bay coast, close to Stellenbosch (probably the Strand area), to deliver the British proclamation and purchase some cattle and sheep. Two days later Captain Todd of the *Echo* reported that some of his men landed under a flag of truce and distributed the proclamation. Though the inhabitants were friendly enough and there were much cattle and

²⁰³ CA C231, Resolutiën (Secrete), 12/8/1795, Elphinstone and Craig - Council of Policy, 12/8/1795, pp.487-92.

²⁰⁴ C231, Resolutiën, 17/8/1795, pp.493-495, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Dundas, 18/8/1795, p.353.

sheep around, they were not allowed to sell anything to the British.²⁰⁷ Due to the lack of supplies and a shortage of medical provisions, the number of ill and indisposed at the Muizenberg camp was rising. On 15 September (after Clarke's arrival), the Marine commander, Major Ballingall, urgently requested medicine and "other necessities ... there is none of these articles here ... there are near one hundred sick here...".²⁰⁸

Meanwhile the Cape forces were inactive at Wynberg, while the British should not have been given the respite. Without provisions and reinforcements, their advance through the difficult terrain would have been very laborious due to their shortage of transport, horses, oxen, field artillery and the relative small force they had available. As the assaulting force their hold on foreign soil was at best precarious; hence, persistent well-organised attacks on their beachhead would have made things very difficult for them.²⁰⁹ Despite this, the VOC authorities were undecided about the wisdom of such an attack at this stage.²¹⁰

After the Dutch withdrew to Wynberg, they established picket posts at Steenberg, Sandvlei and Bergvliet on 10 August. By 17 August 200 *pandoers*, two sections of burgher cavalry, 50 infantrymen and 30 artillerymen manned the post at Steenberg. Thirty *pandoers* and burgher cavalry were later despatched to Hout Bay. Numerous small skirmishes took place during August in which burgher and *pandoer* patrols exchanged fire with the British, sometimes forcing them from their picket positions, but usually withdrawing when reinforcements arrived. On 24 August some *pandoers* under Captain Cloete attacked the British pickets at Muizenberg and forced them back, with some casualties.²¹¹ During the night of 26-27 August the British tried to take revenge and McKenzie attacked with 700 men. They failed to pin down the Cape forces, while the *pandoers* fired on their rearguard as they retreated.²¹²

Burghers and artillery officers at Wynberg tried to convince their commanders to launch a large scale attack on the British positions at Muizenberg, especially since their reinforcements had not yet arrived. Though limited successes were achieved with guerrilla type attacks, the government was not convinced that an attack should take place.²¹³ The discontent grew to such an extent that Sluysken appointed a commission on 28 August to investigate the matter. They

²⁰⁷ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Elphinstone – Nepean, 4/7/1795; and Elphinstone Journal, 27/8/1795 and 29/8/1795, pp.106-8, and 124.

²⁰⁸ *Keith Papers*, I, Ballingall – Jackson, 15/9/1795, p.364.

²⁰⁹ J. Holland Rose, *William Pitt and The Great War*, p.254.

²¹⁰ A.J. Sluysken, *Verbaal gehouden by den Commissaris van de Caap De Goede Hoop*, pp.183-184 and p.191.

²¹¹ A.J. Sluysken, *Verbaal gehouden by den Commissaris van de Caap De Goede Hoop*, pp.170 and 183-4.

²¹² *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Elphinstone Journal, 27/8/1795, p.124.

²¹³ CA VC76, H.D. Campagne, *Memorie en bijzonderheden wegens overgave der Kaap* p.82.

reported two days later that the British at Muizenberg were down to 600 men. Plans were drawn for an attack, but it was so openly and frequently discussed, that the British probably knew what to expect.²¹⁴ At the beginning of September, four British warships took up positions in front of Muizenberg, ready to assist with naval gunfire support in the case of a Dutch attack.²¹⁵

As the British had tried a few times to capture the Dutch forward position at Steenberg, on 1 September some burghers, artillery and *pandoer* volunteers attacked the British pickets around Muizenberg, without the prior approval of the senior officers.²¹⁶ The attack commenced at 07:00 with the *pandoers* under the command of the brothers Linde advancing along the mountain slopes, while the burghers under the command of Captain Hendrik Cloete and Lieutenant Samuel Katz, advanced along the foot of the mountain. The British withdrew from the first picket, they put the attackers under fire with a 6-pounder at the next post, but was also forced to retreat. The attack was only checked when Captain Brown and about 100 grenadiers of the 78th Regiment marched from Muizenberg and forced the Cape forces to retreat. This incident was a moral victory to the Cape forces and showed the British weakness. Over and above the equipment captured at the two British posts, five British soldiers were taken prisoner and twelve men (including two officers, Major Money Penny and Captain Dentaff) were wounded. There were no casualties on the side of the Cape forces.²¹⁷

Though the *pandoers* showed with this action that they were valuable on the battlefield and cooperated well with the other units, they mutinied that afternoon. Without permission they left their positions at Steenberg and set off to Cape Town. Though implored to return to their positions, they complained that they had to fight at the forefront and would like to see the "Grootbaaz", Sluysken. They were also unhappy because they did not receive their liquor ("soopjes") and tobacco rations, they were lashed ("lyfstraf"), and felt that they were not fighting in their own interests.²¹⁸

When the 170 armed *pandoers* (all but the 30 serving in Hout Bay), reached Cape Town that evening, Sluysken allowed them to march into the Castle and listened to their complaints. They complained about the treatment they received in the interior from the burghers. They no longer wished to risk their lives for a meagre ration and two *Riksdalders* a month, while the

²¹⁴ P. Cullinan, *Robert Jacob Gordon*, p.181.

²¹⁵ 'Decreeten der Nationale Vergadering Repreenteerende het Volk van Nederland', The Hague, 1796, copied in C. Beyers, *Die Kaapse Patriotte*, pp.376-7.

²¹⁶ CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, pp.96-7

²¹⁷ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone Journal, 1/9/1795, pp.356-7; and A.J. Sluysken, *Verbaal gehouden by den Commissaris van de Caap De Goede Hoop*, p.203.

loot captured from the British, was not shared equally. Sluysken thought that they were influenced by the general mood in the colony and fuelled by some individuals, but nonetheless promised to pay attention to the grievances once the British had left. He also gave each an endowment of two Stuiwers.²¹⁹ The *pandoers* marched back to Steenberg the next morning and some burgher NCO's accompanied them as they arrived back at the camp the evening. Sluysken warned the officers of the *pandoers* that such incidents could have disastrous implications for defence and that they had to keep strict discipline. He increased the salaries of the *pandoers* with one *Riksdalder* per month for troops and two for corporals. Salaries had to be paid on a weekly basis, the men had to receive their food and wine ration on a daily basis (wine three times per day) and a jacket and trousers must be made for every man. The loot taken from the British also had to be evenly divided.²²⁰

The *pandoers* were regarded as good soldiers, they were always deployed in the front line and Sluysken stated that they were the most valuable infantry as they also showed brave resistance on the battlefield. Marnitz and Campagne, stated that the *pandoers* did especially well in small skirmishes, when the element of surprise was to their advantage.²²¹

The fact that Sluysken did not discipline the *pandoers* for the mutiny set a very bad disciplinary example to the rest of the Cape forces. By early September many of the burgher cavalry had left their positions without permission and went back to their farms.²²² Some ostensibly wished to exchange their horses, while as rumours were spread about a San threat in the interior and a possible slave rebellion in Stellenbosch, many went to their families. At the beginning of September about 900 of the 1141 burgher horsemen remained.²²³

Meanwhile, the Dutch prepared to attack the British at Muizenberg and Marnitz took guns, ammunition and extra men to Wynberg on 1 September.²²⁴ Before the Dutch attack could take place, a British fleet of 13 East Indiamen, with an armed transport, sailed into False Bay on 3 September. It was Clarke's force with about 3000 troops; the 2nd Battalion of the 84th Regiment, the 95th Regiment and the 98th Regiment. The British force, including the engineers

²¹⁸ A.J. Sluysken, *Verbaal gehouden by den Commissaris van de Kaap De Goede Hoop*, pp.203-6, 300-1; and CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, pp.180-4.

²¹⁹ CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, pp.180-4.

²²⁰ J. de Villiers, *Hottentot-Regimente aan die Kaap*, pp.67-70.

²²¹ J. de Villiers, *Hottentot-Regimente aan die Kaap*, pp.79-80.

²²² CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, pp.188-9; and C.L. Neethling, *Onderzoek van't verbaal van A.J. Sluysken*, p.95.

²²³ H.F. Nel, *Die Britse Verowering van die Kaap in 1795*, p.128.

²²⁴ CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, p.185.

and artillery, now effectively totalled about 5000 men.²²⁵ The Dutch attack on Muizenberg was cancelled. Astonishingly though, Sluysken immediately ordered the guns previously moved to Wynberg, back to Cape Town.²²⁶ After the British reinforcements arrived, many of the burgher cavalry in the advance posts at Steenberg, refused to take their positions and some went home.²²⁷

The *Sphynx*, that went to fetch Clarke's force, was badly damaged in a collision with one of Clarke's ships and had to return to San Salvador. As the Portuguese Governor could not spare a warship to escort the convoy, the transport vessels sailed unescorted.²²⁸ They arrived safely at the Cape because the Dutch or French had no naval ability in the southern oceans. If Dutch or French warships were available, it could have caused major problems to the British.

4.4. The Final British Assault

On 5 September Clarke's troops landed at Kalk Bay and at Simon's Bay.²²⁹ British preparations for an attack immediately commenced, as Clarke's orders were clear: he had to "attack immediate and vigorous" and take control of the Cape "in his Majesty's name".²³⁰ Yet, if the objective could be reached without the effort of a fight it was even better, and again intimidation preceded military action: on 9 September Clarke, Elphinstone and Craig wrote an open letter to the population of the Cape in which they were warned that with the reinforcements it was not possible to resist the British onslaught. If they did, they might subject themselves to the destruction of war as "the devastation which must ensure from the wants of army, in the course of whose operations, houses must be destroyed to furnish materials for works, Slaves must be invited – Cattle must be destroyed and Gardens and fields will be little respected".²³¹ Sluysken felt insulted because they did not write to him, but directly to the population. Some of the members of the Council of Policy emphasised the poor defensive capabilities of the Cape and stated that it was "onmogelyk om deeze Hoofdplaatze tegen de Engelschen met eenige hoop van Succes te verdedigen ...".²³² By now the Cape authorities were aware of the true state of

²²⁵ W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa 1795-1895*, p.6.

²²⁶ H.F. Nel, *Die Britse Verowering van die Kaap in 1795*, pp.127-8.

²²⁷ 'Decreeten der Nationale Vergadering Representerende het Volk van Nederland', The Hague, 1796, copied in C. Beyers, *Die Kaapse Patriotte*, p.377.

²²⁸ W.G. Perrin (ed), *Keith Papers*, I, p.222.

²²⁹ NAUK ADM50/64, Admirals Journals, Vice Admiral Elphinstone, *Monarch*, see 5/9/1795.

²³⁰ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Clarke's Orders from the Horse Guards, 4/5/1795, pp.38-9.

²³¹ C231, Resolutiën, 11/9/1795, Elphinstone, Clarke and Craig – Cape Inhabitants, 9/9/1795, pp.518-22, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²³² C231, Resolutiën, 11/9/1795, pp.518-22, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

affairs in the Netherlands, as copies of the documents that were on the *Columbia*, arrived with a Danish ship, the *Aurora*. Sluysken was convinced that the defence must continue and requested support from the burgers.

The Cape was preparing for a certain British attack, yet Sluysken's vouch to defend it did not result in any improvement of the situation at Wynberg. A few promotions of officers and NCO's took place in the garrison and militia, while Ensign Hans Abue was promoted to Lieutenant and appointed as Commandant of the *Corps Pandoeren*.²³³ Sluysken decided to recruit more *pandoers* and asked the Landdrosts in Stellenbosch and Swellendam on 8 September for assistance. Within a few days (by 13 September) more than 80 Khoi recruits arrived and many of them had weapons provided by the burghers. These efforts to create a bigger corps could have been very valuable if done earlier.²³⁴ By the time of the British attack, Cape Town also prepared for a naval attack as Van Baalen reported that six ships had sailed from False Bay. Consequently 100 men from the *Pennisten Corps*, 178 infantrymen, 400 burgers, 42 *sipahis* and 71 convalescent soldiers and sailors were deployed to the west of Cape Town.²³⁵

The want of draught animals and wagons was one of the greatest British problems and both soldiers and seamen were employed in the laborious work of carrying supplies and stores to the base at Muizenberg in preparation for the final advance. The EEIC ships that brought Clarke's force were placed under the Elphinstone's command and on 11 September Captain Rees (the EEIC commodore) received orders from Elphinstone to provide roughly 400 volunteers from his crews to drag the guns for the final assault on the Dutch positions. The men received two days provisioning and as muskets were too cumbersome, they were armed with pistols and cutlasses.²³⁶ In the end, about 420 sailors from the East Indiamen assisted, prompting Craig to remark that, "British sailors alone" were capable "of dragging guns and ammunition in the way in which it was done when we marched from Muisenberg..."²³⁷

At 08:00 on Monday 14 September a signal gun warned that the British were advancing. With the exception of one company, the cavalry at the Cape immediately proceeded to Wynberg.²³⁸ The British advanced with between 4000 and 5000 men (including sappers and artillery) in two columns from Muizenberg. The British apparently had ten field guns (6- and 8-

233

Ibid.

234

J. de Villiers, *Hottentot-Regimente aan die Kaap*, pp.74-5.

235

C231, *Resolutiën*, 14/9/1795, pp.523-7, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

236

NAUK WO1/893, *Memorial of Captain James Rees Commodore of the Fleet of East India Ships*, 31/5/1797, pp.132 and 135.

237

NAUK WO1/324, *Cape of Good Hope 1795*, Craig – Dundas, 27/12/1795, pp.903-4.

pounders) and a few howitzers. The troops carried supplies for four days and the guns were dragged by volunteer sailors. As the British marched past Sandvlei towards Wynberg, a detachment was sent to Steenberg and Captain-Lieutenant Kibourg (an officer of the Depot of the Meuron Regiment at the Cape) in command of the post at Steenberg, decided that it would be ludicrous to defend it with a handful of soldiers, *pandoers* and burgher cavalry. He ordered his troops to fall back and take up positions to the south of Wynberg.²³⁹

Van Baalen's forces at Wynberg consisted of about 200 infantry, 150 *pandoers*, 100 artillerists with nine field pieces (one 6-pounder, six 4-pounders and two 3-pounders) and 600 burgher cavalymen – a total of about 1000 men (some sources put the infantry at 230 and the artillery at 88). Van Baalen deployed the infantry in the middle and the artillery on both sides, while the burgher cavalry were on both flanks and the *pandoers* were on the right flank. Captain Kibourg commanded the right flank, Captain-Lieutenant Stephan and Lieutenant Marnitz were in command of the artillery and Captain Lutjens commanded the left flank. Some of the cavalry had dismounted and positioned themselves between the infantry and the artillery.²⁴⁰ Theal stated that Van Baalen's force were deployed "in a faulty manner ... placing his cannon in such a position that they were practically useless".²⁴¹ According to Marnitz Van Baalen drew up his forces in such a way that the Cape infantry and cavalry were unnecessarily exposed to the British artillery, as he placed the artillery, cavalry and infantry in a direct line.²⁴²

The only serious opposition for the advancing British columns came from some of the Swellendam burgher cavalry, under Lieutenant Daniël Du Plessis, that harassed the columns, killing one sailor and wounding 17 others. They were, nonetheless, forced back by fierce fire from the British columns. Their action so won the respect of Clarke that he, after the final surrender, invited Du Plessis to dine with him and complemented him on his boldness.²⁴³

Clarke launched a frontal attack on Wynberg with his main force at about 15:00. The Dutch artillery fired too early as the British forces were still out of range. The British field artillery (with a long field gun) had a longer range and as they also used a larger powder charge, they could hit the forces deployed at Wynberg.²⁴⁴ McKenzie reported that as they advanced on Wynberg the infantry marched in the centre, while the light companies protected the flanks and

²³⁸ C231, Resolutiën, 14/9/1795, pp.523-7, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²³⁹ J. de Villiers, *Hottentot-Regimente aan die Kaap*, p.77.

²⁴⁰ CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, p.198.

²⁴¹ G.M. Theal, *History of Africa South of the Zambesi*, III, p.339.

²⁴² See CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, p.198.

²⁴³ C.L. Neethling, *Onderzoek van't verbaal van A.J. Sluysken*, p.85; and W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa 1795-1895*, p.10.

²⁴⁴ See P.W. Marnitz, *The Dutch Surrender of the Cape of Good Hope, 1795*, p.53.

drove the cavalry off. McKenzie stated he was ordered to “scour everything and to scramble into their works.” His infantrymen fired as they advanced, but met with “very little interruption”.²⁴⁵

Clarke tried to envelop Van Baalen’s left flank, which according to Marnitz would not have been possible if they placed two field guns with covering troops along the road on their left flank. However, due to the failure of the Dutch artillery and the fear of being flanked and cut off from Cape Town, the Dutch infantry and burgher cavalry retreated when they were within range of British fire, virtually without returning fire, and the artillery was compelled to follow.²⁴⁶ Some of the infantry and artillery that did wish to resist, were immediately driven back by the impetus of the British attack. McKenzie reported that they burned their magazines and “retreated as fast as their horses would permit”.²⁴⁷

Van Baalen retreated to Drie Kopjes (also Driekoppen, at Mowbray). Clarke tried to pursue them, but since his troops were tired and overburdened, he halted at Nieuwland (Newlands), only an hour from Cape Town.²⁴⁸ Casualties were slight; the British had five men killed, while four officers and 29 men were wounded. Only two of the Cape defenders were killed (one infantryman and one cavalryman) and one was wounded.²⁴⁹

At Drie Kopjes the infantry and artillery formed up, while many of the cavalry crossed the Salt River and went inland. The burgher cavalry protesting that they were betrayed by Sluysken, Gordon and the other officers, and refused to man the French Lines, as they believed that they might be trapped and end up as prisoners of war. So, many went home.²⁵⁰ The Council of Policy maintained that those left were not of much use: “een aansienlyk gedeelte na huis gevlug was, terwyl de overgebleeven reets te meermaale hadden getoond, dat van geen andere nuttigheid waaren, als sig agter het geschut te posteeren”.²⁵¹ Barrow generally showed much contempt for the burgher population and referred to the “cowardice of this undisciplined rabble”, who after being fired upon “... the brave burgher cavalry scampered away to their respective homes without once stopping to look behind them”.²⁵²

The defences around Cape Town were manned: some of the infantry, the *Pennisten Corps*, burgher infantry and infantry of the *Invalides* were deployed in the French Lines, while a

²⁴⁵ W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa*, McKenzie – Seaforth, 16/9/1795, pp.8-9.

²⁴⁶ See CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, p.198.

²⁴⁷ W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa*, McKenzie – Seaforth, 16/9/1795, p.9.

²⁴⁸ C231, Resolutiën, 14/9/1795, pp.523-7, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005); and CA VC76, H.D. Campagne, *Memorie en Bijzonderheden wegens overgawe der Kaap*, pp.125-79.

²⁴⁹ W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa*, p.7.

²⁵⁰ C231, Resolutiën, 14/9/1795, pp.523-7, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁵¹ C231, Resolutiën, 14/9/1795, pp.523-7, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁵² J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, pp.146-7.

few artillerists were positioned along the slopes of Devils Peak.²⁵³ Marnitz was very critical of the deployment of the artillerists, since batteries like *Kyk in die Pot*, *Chavonnes*, *Amsterdam*, *Mouille* and *Roggebaay* were well staffed, while the batteries along the Sea Lines (with a sandy beach in front of them) had no artillery, and the guns of *Fort Knokke* could not be served.²⁵⁴

5. THE DUTCH CAPITULATION

After the retreat from Wynberg the Council of Policy met. The situation seemed hopeless. Sluysken stated that the British had deployed 4000 regular soldiers an hour from Cape Town, while they also threatened the Cape from the sea. The defenders had 542 infantrymen, 68 men from the depots of Meuron and Württemberg, 100 men from the *Pennisten Corps*, 42 *sipahis*, 71 sick or recovering soldiers, 800 burger cavalry at the most, 400 burger infantry, 400 artillerists, 200 officials and sailors (from the VOC shore establishment as well as from the packet boat *Star*). Not sufficient to man all the defences around the Cape. Sluysken stated that the small Cape force, had over the three months done all it could to defend the Cape, while they hoped that some support might arrive from Europe.²⁵⁵ The general atmosphere at this meeting was one of desperation and defeat. They feared a British attack during the night and Gordon and Sluysken stressed that the Cape could no longer be defended against an enemy like the British. Gordon maintained that the fortifications of the French Lines were of no use and that further resistance would be in vain.²⁵⁶

Only one member of the Council, W.F. Van Rheede van Oudtshoorn, still showed fighting spirit and did not agree that it was no longer possible to defend the Cape. He argued that the Cape should not be surrendered to the British, and though he was “onkundig gelaaten van het defensieweezen deezer plaatse”, he was prepared to continue with the struggle.²⁵⁷ The Council differed, and in order to prevent the Cape and its inhabitants from experiencing the destruction of plunder and looting, the British should be asked for a 48-hour truce so that the best capitulation conditions could be negotiated. Letters were written to the British commanders and Sluysken's aide-de-camp, Captain Zorn, went off under the flag of truce to the British.²⁵⁸

²⁵³ CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, pp.125-6.

²⁵⁴ P.W. Marnitz, *The Dutch Surrender of the Cape of Good Hope, 1795*, p.54.

²⁵⁵ C231, Resolutiën, 14/9/1795, pp.523-527, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁵⁶ CA VC76, H.D. Campagne, *Memorie en Bijzonderheden wegens overgawe der Kaap*, pp.140-1.

²⁵⁷ C231, Resolutiën, 14/9/1795, pp.523-527, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁵⁸ C.J. Barnard, Robert Jacob Gordon, p.425.

At about midnight on 14 September, Maj Gen Clarke granted a 24-hour truce. Gordon broke the news to his troops at 03:00 on 15 September, and ordered the troops, except those manning some of the advanced infantry positions and the artillery in the batteries to stand down.²⁵⁹ At 07:00 on 15 September the Council of Policy met. As they believed an attack from the sea was possible, Sluysken was convinced that they did not have the ability to further resist against the overwhelming British force (now estimated at 5000) with strong naval support. They had no alternative but to capitulate and he suggested a series of articles of capitulation.²⁶⁰

The whole of 15 September was spent on negotiations and the only excitement came from Hout Bay, where the Dutch batteries fired on British warships. Blankett sailed from Simon's Bay with the *America*, *Echo*, *Rattlesnake* and the East Indiamen, *Bombay Castle* in a feint attack to coincide with the British offensive on land in order to try and distract some of the Dutch attention from the main British offensive at Wynberg.²⁶¹ At noon (on 15 September) they stood into Hout Bay and Blankett ordered the *Echo*, closer inshore to fire a gun or two with the intention to "... alarm the Coast and to invite fire of the Enemy in order to know the position and strength of their Batteries, the *America* and the other Ships following under easy sail as if preparing to enter the Bay". This had the effect they hoped for and the batteries returned fire "... keeping up a smart fire from two Batteries, one on each side of the Bay, notwithstanding the distance the Ships were off the Shore".²⁶²

Blankett sailed close to the coast and reported that "along the shore" he "gave and received several shots from different batteries". When they entered Table Bay and came round "Green Point the Batteries opened fire and fired several shots"²⁶³ and they also observed horsemen "between three and five hundred" advancing round the point of Table Bay. Altogether 30 shots were fired at them from the *Mouille*, *Chavannes* and the *Amsterdam* batteries. The ships kept closer to Robben Island, did not return fire and anchored off the Island. As Blankett had no knowledge of the 24 hour truce, he went ahead with their original plan. The battery commanders were informed about the truce, but were ordered not to allow the ships to come within range. That night, Sluysken with a large following, inspected the defences.²⁶⁴ This was the only action the fortifications at the Cape saw, and they acted promptly and efficiently.

²⁵⁹ CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, p.221.

²⁶⁰ C231, Resolutiën, 15/9/1795, pp.528-32, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁶¹ NAUK ADM51/1136, Journal of the Proceedings Commodore Blankett, 14/9/1795 and 15/9/1795; and NAUK WO1/893, Memorial of Captain James Rees Commodore ..., 31/5/1797, p.132.

²⁶² *Keith Papers*, I, Blankett – Elphinstone, 19/9/1795, p.376.

²⁶³ NAUK ADM51/1136, Journal of the Proceedings Commodore Blankett, 15/9/1795 and 16/9/1795.

²⁶⁴ CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, pp.218-21.

In the meantime, when Captain-Lieutenant Kemper (in Hout Bay) learned about the truce, he abandoned the position, destroying the ammunition, set fire to the Camp and then marched along the coast to the Cape. The positions in Camps Bay and in the Kloof were not abandoned. In Cape Town much uncertainty existed around the capitulation. As the warships had arrived and the British had forced the defenders from Wynberg, it caused trepidation and fear amongst the inhabitants, with the result that many fled inland with their families.²⁶⁵

The Council of Policy agreed to the conditions for the surrender of the Cape late on the night of 15 September. Early the next morning the Articles of Capitulation were signed at Rustenburg. According to the terms agreed upon, Dutch troops would become prisoners of war, while the officers could either stay at the Cape or return to Europe; on the provision that they give their word of honour not to serve against the British for the duration of the war. All VOC property had to be handed over to the British, but private property would be respected and the population were to retain all their privileges.²⁶⁶ When the Council of Policy had to sign the document on 16 September, Van Rhee de van Oudtshoorn was the only member to disagree with surrendering the Cape. He stated that he was not kept informed about the defence of the Cape and was prepared to continue the struggle with the *Pennisten Corps*.²⁶⁷

Initially the Dutch kept it secret, but word actually leaked out during the night. Many of the burghers and military were adamant that they were sold out and some declared that they will not accept the peace of the Council of Policy. Many soldiers felt betrayed since they were to become prisoners of war and did not have the opportunity to show their real fighting abilities, they committed a number of excesses, smashed the windows of the artillery barracks and were generally unruly.²⁶⁸ Rather than having to surrender, about 100 members of the artillery corps deserted and went into the interior.²⁶⁹ Gordon was specifically blamed for this humiliation. As the situation was getting out of hand and the Dutch commanders feared a riot, they urged the British to come to their aid as soon as possible.

At 14:00 on Wednesday 16 September the British occupied the batteries of the French Lines. Craig then marched into Cape Town with 1400 soldiers (1200 infantrymen and 200 artillerymen), ten field guns and a few howitzers. They formed up on the Grand Parade in front

²⁶⁵ CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, p.226.

²⁶⁶ *Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History*, Articles of Capitulation, Rustenburg, 16/9/1795, p.3.

²⁶⁷ C231, Resolusiën, 16/9/1795, pp.540-4, <http://databases.tanap.net/cgh/> (accessed in 2005).

²⁶⁸ CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, p.235.

²⁶⁹ H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind*, p.47.

of the Castle.²⁷⁰ The VOC garrison then marched out with their standards flying and drums beating. This was the first and the last time since the arrival of the British task force that Gordon appeared at the head of his men. According to eyewitness accounts of Marnitz and others, the soldiers swore and jeered at Gordon. Somehow he brought them to the halt and it is said, for the first and last time since the British arrival, he drew his sabre. Sword in hand Gordon then ordered the troops to present arms and lay down their weapons. His order was met by shouts and insults. Formalities were abandoned. Scornfully the soldiers threw their weapons to the ground, while shouting and insulting their officers, calling them turncoats and crooks!²⁷¹ One soldier actually assaulted Gordon, condemning him as a traitor. The British apparently did nothing and looked at the affair “vol afscrik en afschuw”.²⁷² The soldiers made their bitter resentment of Gordon and the way in which the British took possession of the Cape clear.

The British were elated about their victory. McKenzie wrote with some relief on 16 September that they now hoped to “enjoy the comforts of a quite life, in a charming country, after all our troubles and fatigues”.²⁷³ On 17 September the batteries in Simon’s Bay and “all the ships of the squadron saluted with 15 guns in celebration of the victory”.²⁷⁴ At the same time Blankett anchored in Table Bay and the *America* became the first British warship to salute the British Flag on the Castle with 19 guns, receiving 15 guns in return. Blankett reported that there were two Danish, one American and three Dutch vessels in the roadstead. This was now a British anchorage!²⁷⁵

The British commanders had in general maintained good discipline over their troops and transgressions were punished with severity. It was only between Muizenberg and Wynberg that some looting and unruly behaviour took place, but it apparently involved seamen and not soldiers. Most of the British troops bivouacked behind the Castle, while the 98th Regiment immediately marched into the Castle – it was to be their home for the next seven years.²⁷⁶

On 7 October the British issued a proclamation stating that “His Britannic Majesty is become the sole and only lawful sovereign to whom all persons residing in the Colony owe allegiance and fidelity”.²⁷⁷ With the Cape they obtained a large number of guns and ammunition, a large supply of wheat, merchandise in the stores, the money chest of the VOC, the loan bank,

²⁷⁰ W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa*, p.7.

²⁷¹ C.J. Barnard, Robert Jacob Gordon, p.428, verifies this account with reference to numerous sources like Marnitz and Campagne.

²⁷² G.J. Schutte, ‘Een Vergeten Pamflet: de Apologie van R.J. Gordon’ in *Historia*, p.105.

²⁷³ W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa*, McKenzie – Seaforth, 16/9/1795, p.9.

²⁷⁴ ADM50/64, Admirals Journals, Vice Admiral Elphinstone, *Monarch*, see 17/9/1795.

²⁷⁵ NAUK ADM51/1136, Journal of the Proceedings Commodore Blankett, see 17/9/1795.

²⁷⁶ W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa*, p.7.

slaves and well equipped workshops and stores.²⁷⁸ The Dutch soldiers that deserted to the British were taken into British service and received a bounty of £2,00 each. Most joined the marines and Elphinstone were impressed with the new recruits, as “they have served faithfully and are excellent German soldiers”.²⁷⁹

Seven Dutch ships also fell into British hands: the outward bound VOC ships *Geertruida* and *Willemstad en Boetzelaar*; three homeward-bound VOC East Indiamen, *De Jonge Bonifacius*, *Vertrouwen* and *Louisa Anthonia*; as well as two ships stationed at the Cape, the *Castor* and the packet *Star*.²⁸⁰ Obviously the richly laden East Indiamen were worth much in prize money, but Elphinstone was very impressed with the *Willemstadt en Boetzelaar*, stating she was “most completely found, with copper in her hold for the purpose of sheathing her bottom”.²⁸¹ He immediately commissioned her as the *HMS Princess* (26) with Captain Hardy in command. The packet boat *Star*, an armed brig, “being fit for his Majesty’s service and much wanted”, was commissioned as the *HMS Hope*.²⁸²

According to the prize money system of the Royal Navy the value of ships and goods captured were divided amongst the officers and men, with the most senior officer predictably getting the lion’s share. Dundas assured Elphinstone that as the Netherlands and Britain were at war; what they captured was booty.²⁸³ The army did not share in booty as a matter of course and Craig wrote to the King on behalf of the officers and men of the 78th Regiment; asking for some of the bounty money to be bestowed on them for property taken at the Cape.²⁸⁴ It is uncertain if they were successful in their appeal.

The EEIC ships stayed at the Cape to 18 October and were utilised as transports. Elphinstone was grateful for the valuable contribution they made and in a letter to Rees (dated 16 September), he thanked the officers and crews of the “India ships for assisting ... greatly to contribute towards the fortunate event of the seduction of this valuable colony”.²⁸⁵ The EEIC complained to the War Office that it took five months from Britain to their departure from the Cape, and as they arrived too late in the East to acquire quality articles, they made a

²⁷⁷ CA BO180, Proclamations, Clarke, Elphinstone and Craig, 7/10/1795, pp.21-3.

²⁷⁸ CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, Verhaal van de overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop, pp.243-7.

²⁷⁹ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Dundas, 12/09/1795, pp.362-3.

²⁸⁰ J.R. Bruijn et al; *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping*, III, pp.572-3.

²⁸¹ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Dundas, 12/09/1795, p.362.

²⁸² *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Admiralty, 23/09/1795, p.373.

²⁸³ WO1/324, Cape of Good Hope 1795, Dundas – Elphinstone, 16/1/1796, pp.485-7.

²⁸⁴ NAUK WO1/324. Cape of Good Hope 1795. Craig – King George III, To the King, The Humble Memorial of Major General James Henry Craig on behalf of himself and the officers, non commissioned officers and private men of six companies of the 2nd battalion of the 78th Regiment, 27/12/1795, pp.911-8.

considerable loss during the whole trip. Their service to the state, “out of the regular course of duty” to attain “great national objectives”, caused material losses and they requested a reward for the commanders and officers.²⁸⁶ It is uncertain if they were awarded anything.

Nonetheless, the East Indiamen effectively illustrated the valuable contribution a substantial merchant marine made in maritime power projection. Not only were these ships crucial for convoying troops and supplies to the Cape, but they filled in when there were no naval vessels available, while their crews were an extra source of manpower to the fighting forces. Also merchant ships were often ideal to utilise as warships, as the case of the *Willemstadt en Boetzelaar*, illustrated. Yet, it was the riches these ships conveyed across the oceans, which were most important to the maritime empires of the day.

Hardy arrived in London on 23 November with despatches “containing the very pleasing and important intelligence of the surrender of Cape Town...”. Dundas was elated as “this essential establishment ... has been placed under the dominion of Great Britain”.²⁸⁷ The capture of the Cape was so important at the time that in 1795 it was seen as “the event which principally signalled the British arms at sea in the course of this year”.²⁸⁸

The news of the capture of the Cape caused considerable relief at Whitehall.²⁸⁹ Elphinstone was congratulated on the conquest by the First Lord of the Admiralty, Earl Spencer, who wrote on 29 December 1795: “I ... express my very sincere congratulations on the very valuable acquisition which you have obtained for this country at so little expense of lives and money; an acquisition which [is] ... one of the most advantageous we have ever made”.²⁹⁰ No mention is made of the Dutch claim or the protection of the Cape on behalf of the House of Orange. The conquest was in the interest of Britain, the convenient presence of the fugitive Prince Willem in England, was just a stroke of good fortune!

6. AFTER CAPITULATION: THE FATES OF THE MAJOR ROLE PLAYERS

In general the British military commanders conducted themselves well. Elphinstone and Craig had a good working relationship and made the correct strategic decisions; for example to timely sent for Clarke. Before Clarke arrived, a mood of anxiety existed in the British camp, as their

²⁸⁵ NAUK WO1/893, Memorial of Captain James Rees Commodore ..., 31/5/1797, pp.132 and 137.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ NAUK WO1/324, Cape of Good Hope 1795, Dundas – Elphinstone, 16/1/1796, p.483.

²⁸⁸ *Annual Register of the Year 1795*, see C.J. De Villiers, *Die Britse Vloot aan die Kaap*, p.24.

²⁸⁹ J. Holland Rose, *William Pitt and the Great War*, p.254.

foothold was at best unsteady, rations were low and a more resolute enemy could arguably have dislodged them with powerful counterattacks. Yet, Elphinstone's leadership was inspirational, as "the high spirit of the Admiral was of the most essential service" and despite bad weather, Elphinstone had his boat crews, "constantly employed in landing provisions and ammunition for the forces; and the seaman's allowances were doled out with a sparing hand".²⁹¹ We will return to Elphinstone and Craig as military commanders in the next chapter.

What was the status of the so-called Kew correspondence of the Prince of Orange, and were officers that followed his orders necessarily traitors? Prince Willem V did much to promote British sentiments from Kew, but his letters to the colonial governors, trying to persuade them to surrender to Britain, had little influence. The economic elite in the colonies had their own ideas concerning their future, which centred on economic sentiments. In the Netherlands these letters, and the Prince's stance, caused much indignation and a special commission of professors from Leiden University that investigated the matter, concluded that it indeed constituted high treason. But there was no way to prosecute the Prince of Orange.²⁹²

The De Lille case was straightforward: he immediately went into British service, took an oath of allegiance to the British King and was appointed as Barracks Master. Sluysken referred to him as a traitor.²⁹³ Sluysken and Gordon, on the other hand, are more difficult to judge, even though their contemporaries (Marnitz, Campagne, Neethling and Thibault) were convinced that they were turncoats in a conspiracy. In the light of the information about the situation in the Netherlands the Cape authorities had available, the correct thing to do was to defend the Cape in the name of the legitimate Dutch Government. Since Sluysken and most of the members of the Council of Policy were ardent Orange supporters, they abhorred the French revolutionary principles and might have preferred British control. However, the majority of the burghers and the garrison would not have accepted it. It seems then, that handing over the Cape had to be more astute and Gordon, Sluysken, senior VOC officials and some of the officers made sure that it fell to the British.

As Cullinan construed the events, it is incorrect to label Gordon and Sluysken's action as treason and treachery, since one is then blind to the "true nature of these officers' principles and loyalty" and the complexity of the issue is then ignored. Gordon and many of his colleagues' first loyalty was to the Prince of Orange: "therefore once Gordon had decided that the British

²⁹⁰ P. Erskine, 'Admiral Elphinstone's naval task force 1795 1796. The memorabilia of the first British Occupation' in *Antiques in South Africa*, p.88.

²⁹¹ A. Allardyce, *Memoir of the Honourable George Keith Elphinstone*, p.97.

²⁹² G.J.A. Raven and N.A.M. Rodger (eds), *Navies and Armies*, p.54.

²⁹³ CA 1868, Brieven en Papieren van A.J. Sluysken, Sluysken – Heeren XVII, 11/11/1795, pp.67-8.

represented the Prince, it was his clear duty to hand over the Cape to them and work with them until such time as it could be returned to its rightful sovereign".²⁹⁴ Conversely, it must be noted that the British insistence that the Dutch swear an oath of allegiance to King George had already made it clear by late June that they wanted the Cape for themselves.

The events at the Cape must be placed in its proper time, specifically the French Revolution and the destruction of the old social order. News of the reign of terror in Paris and the guillotining of thousands (including Gordon's correspondent in France, one J.S. Bailly) was a gruesome warning of the realities of the revolutionary changes. As a matter of course, members of class would therefore support the *ancien regime* (or the Prince of Orange) and not revolutionary France. Nevertheless, despite these loyalties, the defenders of the Cape (the political authority and the military leaders) had to act in the best interest of the Netherlands.

Regarding Sluysken the issue at stake is: why did he not ensure that the Cape defences were better organised? Did he not see the military errors, or did he play along? Evidence suggests that Sluysken was verbally very enthusiastic about defending the Cape and he constantly condemned the British attempt to seize it. Yet, his verbal resistance was not put into practice, and it became rhetoric. Even though Sluysken did not have a military background, the lack of proper military effort must have been evident and he never challenged his officers, or relieved officers like Gordon from their duties. He allowed Gordon to strengthen the *Mouille Battery*, while the enemy was advancing from the opposite direction. Considering the political situation at the Cape and personal loyalties of people in his circle, Sluysken was definitely in a difficult position. Yet, as an *Oranjeman*, he probably preferred a British takeover to the French and perhaps realised that for the sake of honour, or in order to prevent an uprising at the Cape, some form of defence should be attempted, but that capitulation would be best under the circumstances. Van Rheede van Oudtshoorn, the only member of the Council of Policy to protest against the capitulation of the Cape, instituted legal steps against Sluysken, wanted him arrested, his property confiscated and wished to prevent him from departing – but to no avail. Sluysken departed with a cartel ship on 12 November 1795.²⁹⁵ An investigation which was subsequently conducted in the Netherlands, exonerated Sluysken from any wrongdoing.

What became of Gordon, a man of the age of reason, a thinker and traveller, and through his work in the natural sciences, a man of international repute? The first loyalty of officers is to the legitimate government of the day. In this context many former royal officers served in the armies of revolutionary France. It is self-evident that the incapacity of the VOC

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Cullinan, *Robert Jacob Gordon*, pp.182-4.

officers to do their military duty (defend Dutch property) should be regarded as treachery. Still, why did Gordon neglect his military duty? Cullinan argues that the answer is in his resentment of the ideas of the French Revolution and those supporting it. Gordon abhorred the principles of the French Revolution and referred to the *Patriotten* as "endocrinated dupes". So, he believed that he acted in the best interest of the Netherlands and the House of Orange (since it was clear the British wanted the Cape for themselves) when he organised no effective resistance against the British occupation. This is not outright treason in Cullinan's view, since Gordon acted according to his principles. Not so – as a soldier and an officer, *he did not do his duty!*

In the opinion of patriot-minded Dutch, Gordon was nothing but a traitor: "laffe en lage ziel, jij hebt je vaderland verkocht, je voor de vijand schuil gehouden".²⁹⁶ Gordon became an ostracized, unemployed figure, of little use to anybody and probably suffering from depression. When he went for a walk one evening, four or five of his former soldiers attacked him and gave him "een geweldig pak slaag".²⁹⁷ Gordon believed that the British would keep the Cape for the Prince of Orange and thought that after the British took possession of the Cape, they would govern it in the name of the Dutch sovereign. Nothing of this happened, the British flag was hoisted on all batteries and on 7 October a proclamation stated that "His Britannic Majesty is become the sole and only lawful sovereign ...".²⁹⁸

By 22 October the Gordon tragedy was nearing its end. He had little utility value to the British and pathetically the only minor service he could provide, was to give Elphinstone intelligence on Dutch and French ship movements. In another of the "missing" letters, he referred to the French as "our enemy" and offered news contained in a letter he received from his nephew (the First Lieutenant on the *Amazoon* and a staunch Orange supporter) to Elphinstone. The detail was that *Amazoon* was patrolling the Strait of Sunda, while two French privateers (a large frigate and a brig) also patrolled the Indian Seas. As a former Dutch soldier whose country was at war with Britain, this could be sensitive information and that amounts to treason. It was as if it all became too much. Gordon's emotions then seemed to overcome him, his handwriting worsened and chillingly he drew a line right across the page. On a personal note he exclaimed "good god. I am almost distracted ... I am here a prisoner ... with all those circumstances, and ruin'd with so many others, besides a wife and four children".²⁹⁹

²⁹⁵ C. Beyers, *Die Kaapse Patriotte*, p.257.

²⁹⁶ G.J. Schutte, 'Een Vergeten Pamflet: de Apologie van R.J. Gordon' in *Historia*, p.106.

²⁹⁷ G.J. Schutte, 'Een Vergeten Pamflet: de Apologie van R.J. Gordon' in *Historia*, p.105.

²⁹⁸ CA BO180, Proclamations, Clarke, Elphinstone and Craig, 7/10/1795, pp.21-3.

²⁹⁹ BL MS344/155, Gordon – Elphinstone, 22/10/1795.

Gordon felt betrayed and probably regretted his part in the miserable defence of the Cape, was deeply insulted and became depressed. "As an honourable man there was only one way he could resolve the appalling dilemma facing him",³⁰⁰ he committed suicide in his garden on the morning of 25 October 1795.

The last of the "missing" Gordon letters was written by his widow (Susanna Nicolet) immediately after his suicide. She appealed to Elphinstone for advice and to "look after" her and her four children. Whether Elphinstone ever supported her or not, is unclear, he simply pencilled onto the letter that he "attended her by Day and took measures for avoiding the effects of the Loss against Suicide".³⁰¹

Gordon's real motives remain unclear. It only leaves questions. Did he really resent the revolution so much that he was prepared to commit treason for what he believed in? Or, was it an issue of unconditional loyalty to the Prince of Orange and the British? Perhaps, he thought that it was the end of the Dutch at the Cape and wished for an appointment in the British service? No trace of a British offer remained; perhaps they did not trust him? It remains guesswork.

The Council of Justice performed a post mortem and investigated Gordon's death. The verdict of the Fiscal was that he might have been shot by some person. Marnitz stated that the British commanders arranged it, to save the family more embarrassment, as the angle from which the bullet entered the skull indicated clearly that it was suicide. Shortly after Gordon's death the executioner hanged himself. Coarse jokes immediately followed, and it was said that the devil refused to receive Gordon unless accompanied by an aide!³⁰²

In contrast Dutch naval officers like Dekker and De Jong understood their responsibility and the honour of their professions. De Jong emphasised that he always adhered to the principle of Admiral Robert Blake who served with honour under Cromwell and under King Charles I, stating that "een Officier moet blijven dienen, welke veranderingen, welke omwentelingen ook in het Staatsbewind van zijn land plaats vinden, aangezien hij zijn Vaderland en niet de Regeering of het Bewind in der tijd dient ...".³⁰³ Officers like De Jong and Dekker had everything to loose, and in fact they did loose much due to the new regime, yet they stayed loyal to their country.

³⁰⁰ P. Cullinan, *Robert Jacob Gordon*, p.185.

³⁰¹ BL MS344/156, Susanna Gordon – Elphinstone, 25/10/1795.

³⁰² CA VC75, P.W. Marnitz, *Verhaal van de overgaave van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, pp.252-6.

³⁰³ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, I, pp.x-xi.

7. CONCLUSION

The strategic value of the Cape and the sea route to the East was the most important cause of the First British Occupation of the Cape. Since big profits were to be made from this trade and British interest in India grew considerably, the tug of war between the maritime empires of the day for control of the Cape becomes obvious and by the late eighteenth century the Cape was literally seen as the “key” to the East.

Once Britain decided to take control of the Cape, they endeavoured to achieve this goal as cheaply as possible, since a state with world-wide commitments, involved in a global war, did not wish to waste scarce resources unnecessarily – if victory was possible without expensive battles, so much the better. Dundas took much trouble to allow for quick and effective preparations so that the task force could sail at the first opportunity. The commanders could communicate directly with him and it functioned effectively as they had a direct link with the political authority regarding strategic issues, while messages did not have to go through various headquarters and staff officers.³⁰⁴ In an effort to facilitate achieving the objective, the British not only arrived at the Cape with warships, guns and soldiers, but were also armed with a letter from the exiled Prince of Orange. Since the British preferred victory without a fight, they negotiated with the Dutch authorities, appealed to them to accept British 'protection' as they acted in accordance with the Prince of Orange's wishes and concurrently they also targeted specific persons (like Gordon), who they thought were sympathetic to their cause. They used propaganda and psychological measures skilfully in an effort to break down Dutch resistance and tried to capitalise on the political strife and economic despair at the Cape. In the British proclamations that followed, the weak link (the lack of local cohesion and a national sense of purpose) was targeted. All of this led to the Dutch defence being further deprived of the little cohesion it had. In the end British victory was in essence cheap and nearly bloodless.

The British occupation of the Cape was a valuable exercise in sea power. Sea power enabled Britain to send a fleet to the Cape and as the Dutch and the French lacked a comparable ability, the fleet reached the Cape safely. In the context of the eighteenth century, sea power also made the comparative speed and surprise of the whole operation possible. At the Cape, the British freely roamed the sea, threatened and intimidated the defenders and controlled all external communications as foreign ships were boarded and important documents

³⁰⁴ W.G. Perrin (ed), *The Keith Papers*, I, p.215.

confiscated. In addition, the naval vessels also carried much of the occupation force and served as command and control posts. The important contribution EEIC vessels made must not go unnoticed. A strong merchant marine was very valuable, not only for carrying riches across the oceans, but such vessels were often utilised as warships, supply vessels or troop carriers and became crucial to maritime power projection. Without the EEIC ships and crews, the conquest of the Cape would probably not have been possible.

British sea power gave the British Army much mobility and striking power, and combined with the British mastery of amphibious techniques, its striking power became disproportionate with the size of forces involved. This was a “golden age” of amphibious warfare in the Royal Navy as amphibious techniques were highly valued and their importance recognized.³⁰⁵ A crucial stage for any exercise in maritime power projection is the amphibious landings and gaining a foothold ashore. A force with soldiers sick and fatigued after their long voyage, with provisions and fresh water at a low ebb and without specialized boats or landing craft, was specifically vulnerable during the initial landings and the effort to establish a beachhead. At Simon's Bay, the British easily gained a foothold ashore, on enemy soil, and the Cape defenders never utilised the opportunity to oppose it. Successful amphibious operations also depended on command of the sea, or at least temporary control of the sea. This the British had and when they advanced ashore, the navy provided essential and substantial naval gunfire support. Amphibious warfare, at best a precarious operational tool, was effective in obtaining a new colony.

Why did the defence of the Cape fail? The ramshackle defence efforts of the VOC authority were simply appalling. The deteriorating relationship between the burghers and the VOC had a negative influence on VOC-burgher military cooperation. Due to successive bad governments, the VOC's bankruptcy, economic hardship and the situation on the frontier, much turmoil and disunity existed. The population was divided between support for the Prince of Orange and the *Patriotten*. Though some supported the revolutionary principles, or were inspired by the example of the United States, many were ambivalent about the British as it was just another government. The popular support a government conducting a war required, did not exist.

The discrepancy between the British and Dutch leadership is substantial. Compared to European wars of the time, forces that participated in colonial conflicts were small, which meant that a great premium was placed on leadership (specifically independent leadership as quick

³⁰⁵S. Foster, *Hit the Beach*, p.16.

communications were out of the question), good morale, unit cohesion, a clear grasp of terrain, cohesive action, thorough planning, an understanding of local conditions and politics, as well as the capabilities and limitations of military power. Elphinstone, Craig and Clarke were officers of vast experience, handpicked by Dundas. They cooperated very well, had the ability to organise and lead such an expedition and never acted in a way not beneficial to the maintenance of their aim. The VOC officers had little military experience, they were junior compared to the British and their operational experience was limited to small scale local operations. Due to much political diversity, discipline and trust amongst the Dutch were also lacking.

Though enthusiasm for a proper defence existed amongst a large portion of the defenders, their commanders were obviously of a different intention. They showed little enthusiasm and as no cohesion or inspirational leadership existed, the defenders never gained, or even tried to gain the initiative. They were persistently on a passive defence, while the British on the other hand gained the initiative, stayed on the offensive and dictated the pace of operations. The defensive approach of Gordon and Sluysken in practice amounted to withdrawal and surrender, rather than an active and strong defence.³⁰⁶ When Craig attacked on 8 August to the east of Sandvlei, it presented a unique opportunity to counterattack with superior force from Steenberg. A capable commander could have defeated Craig's force and cut them from their communications with Muizenberg and the ships in False Bay. Furthermore, the British were in Muizenberg for more than a month and nothing was done to dislodge their position. Officers like De Lille did not conduct themselves professionally: they had to defend Dutch property and interest, but in this they failed.

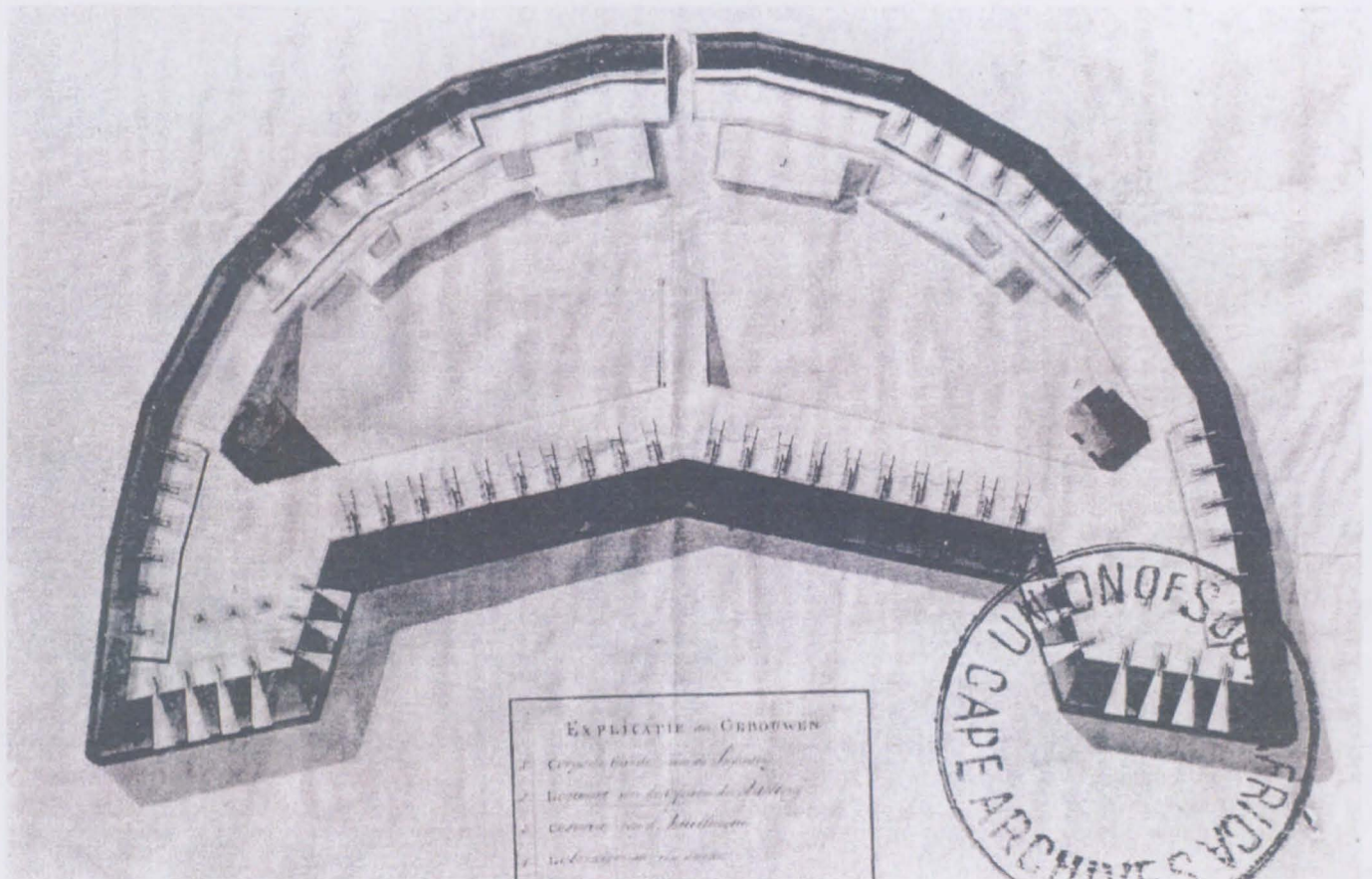
The military should not shoulder all the blame. Nederburgh and Frijkenius made it clear that the defence of the Cape was firstly the task of the Governor, or Commissioner, and that Gordon was his subordinate. Sluysken should have provided strategic guide-lines, yet, he and the Council of Policy did not and besides rhetoric at meetings, they were not too bothered with organising a stern defence. He provided no strategic or inspirational leadership and is equally to blame for the military fiasco.

Proper preparations and defence planning were absent on the VOC side. No coherent defence plan was drawn up after the British arrived and when some of the more diligent officers wished to improve the defences, they were stopped in their efforts. British preparations on the other hand were not exemplary, but at least they had a unified sense of purpose. Their good organisation and tenacity, compared to the lack of cohesion and the way in which the Dutch

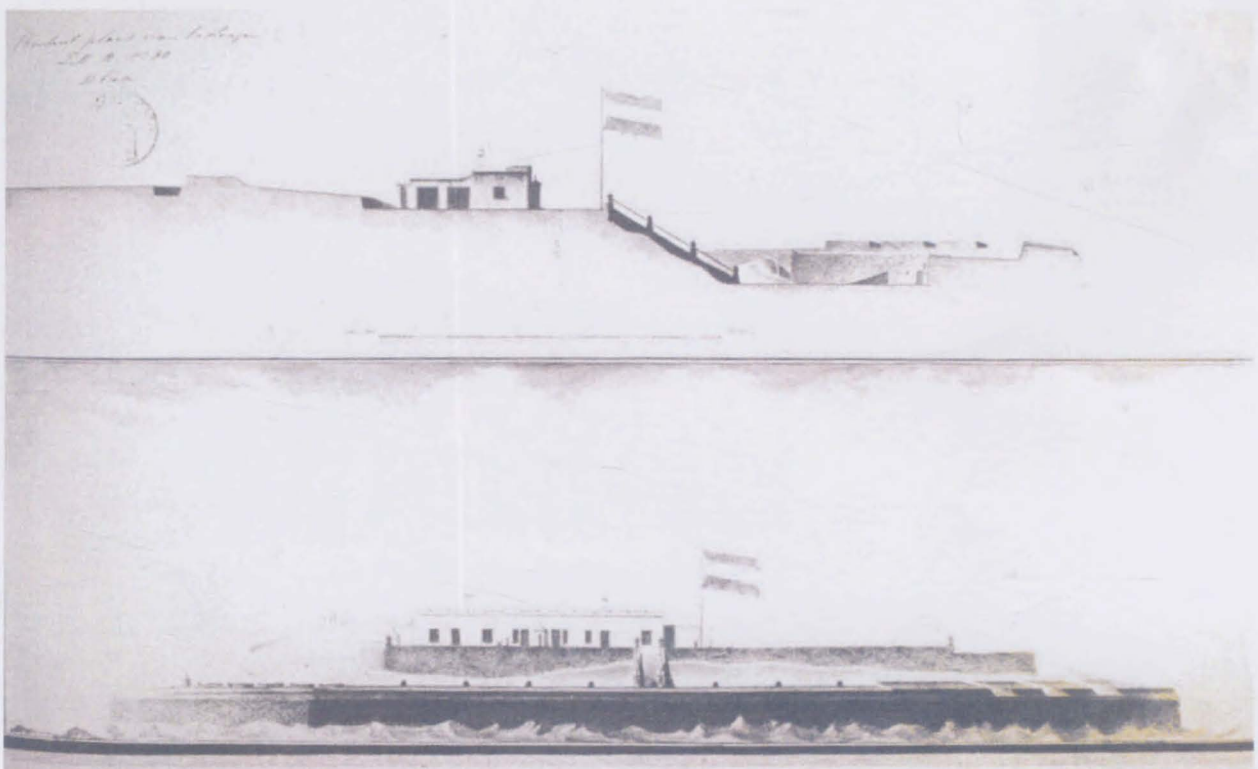
suddenly retreated in the face of the enemy, reveal much about the preparedness, commitment and the differences in morale between the opposing forces. Dutch morale was negated by the serious political disunity, little trust in the leadership and no singular purpose.

The British must be commended on their military and operational intelligence. The system of fortifications provided good protection against a direct assault in Table Bay, while no coherent system of defences existed in False Bay. This they knew. They also had good intelligence on the prominent personalities at the Cape and identified Gordon as the weak link. After their arrival at the Cape every effort was made to set foot ashore, travel to Cape Town and obtain as much information as possible about the fortifications, defences, topography and society. In addition, the navy patrolled the coast and took soundings off Muizenberg and around the peninsula to facilitate naval operations. Their good intelligence paid off in the end.

The expansion of British commerce and the struggle for sea power necessitated the acquisition of strategic points like the Cape. This reinforced the British naval supremacy and provided opportunities for economic growth. Though British conquests of the period were not renowned as spectacular victories or dramatic feats of arms, the overseas empires of France and the Netherlands quietly disappeared into Britain's grasp. In the same way the Cape was acquired with ease due to the dismal Dutch defence effort. Next, the focus will fall on how the British performed when they had to defend the Cape against a Dutch onslaught.



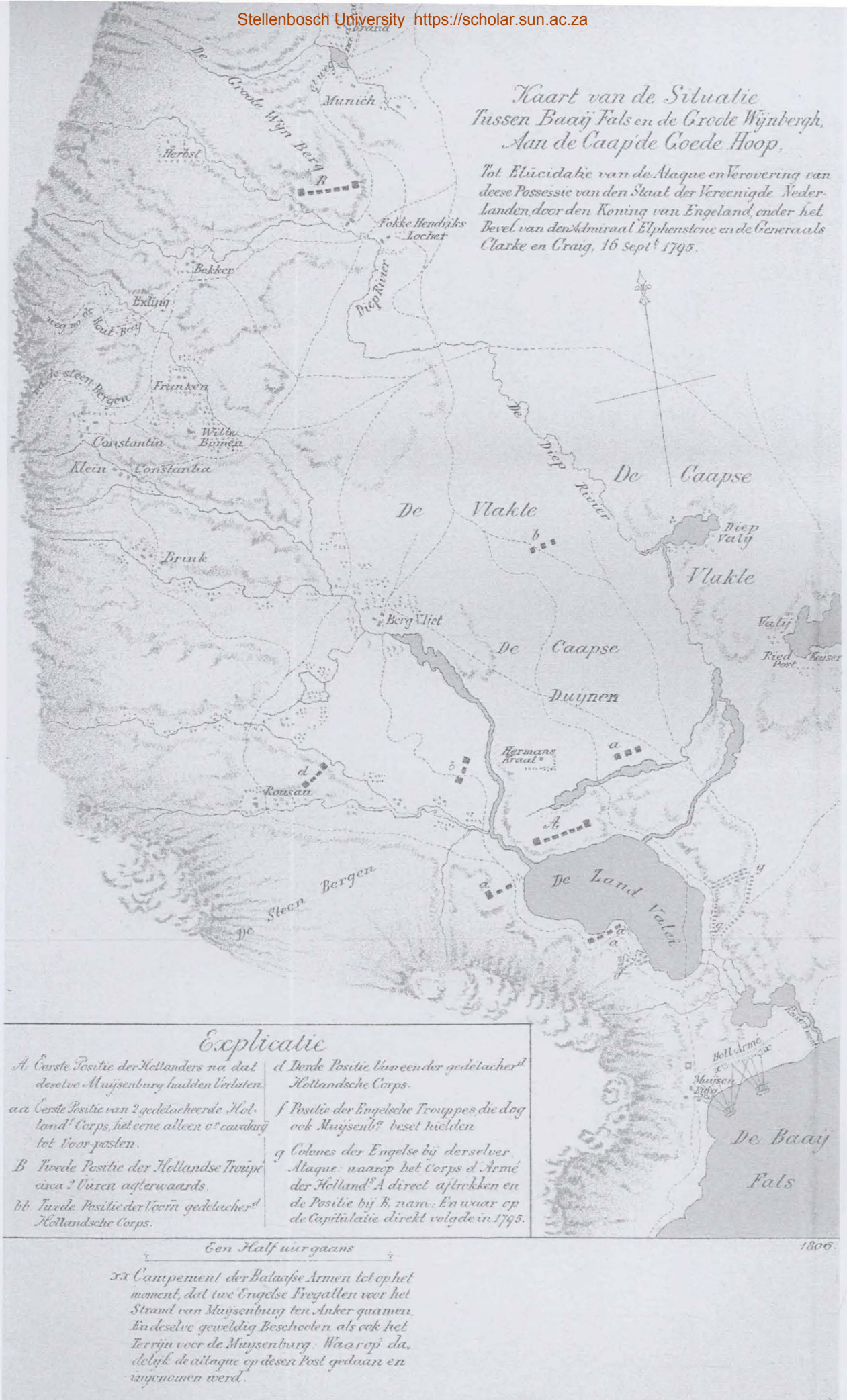
9. Amsterdam Battery, 1785



10. Chavonnes Battery, 1790



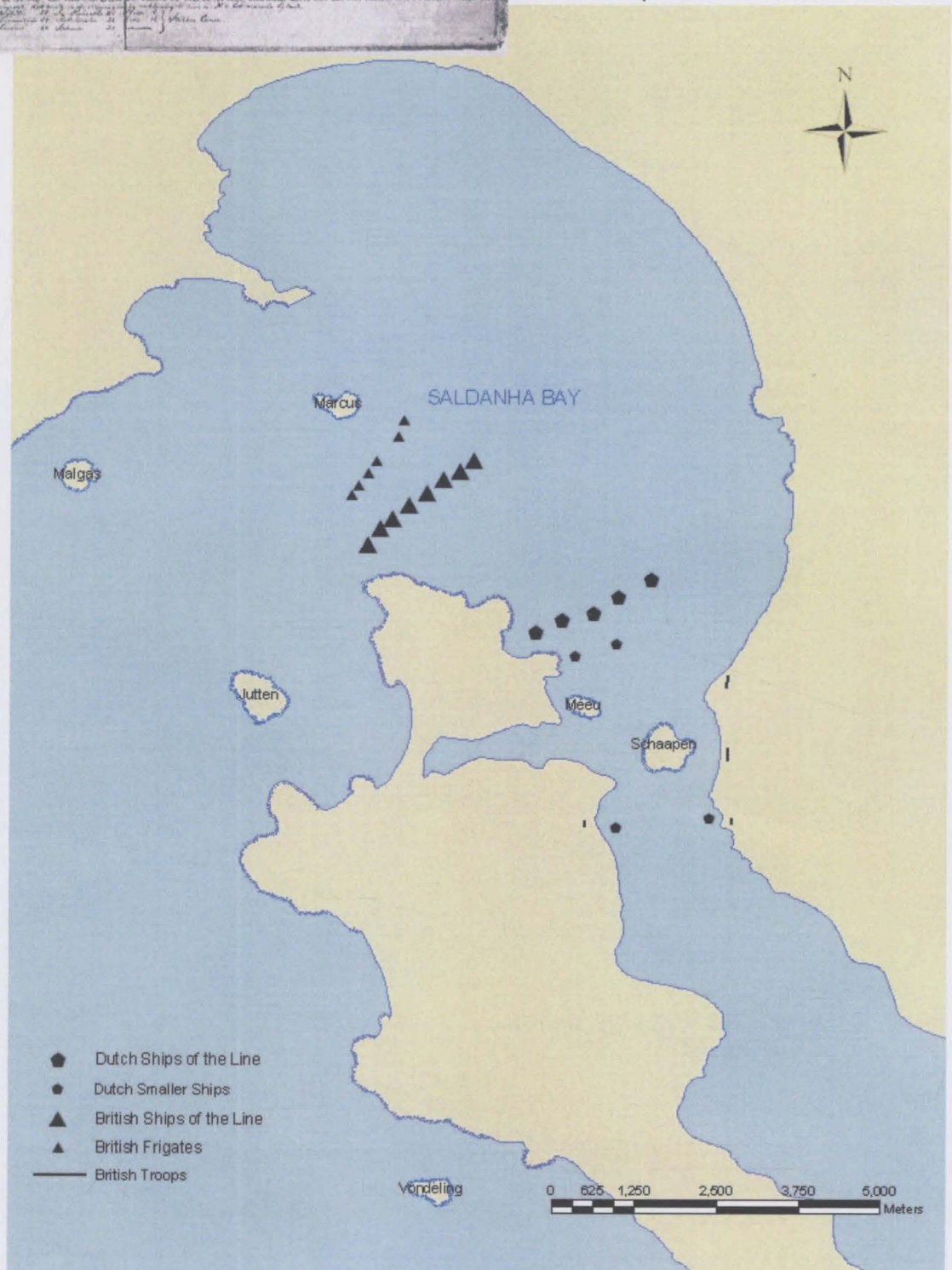
11. Fortifications around Cape Town, 1793

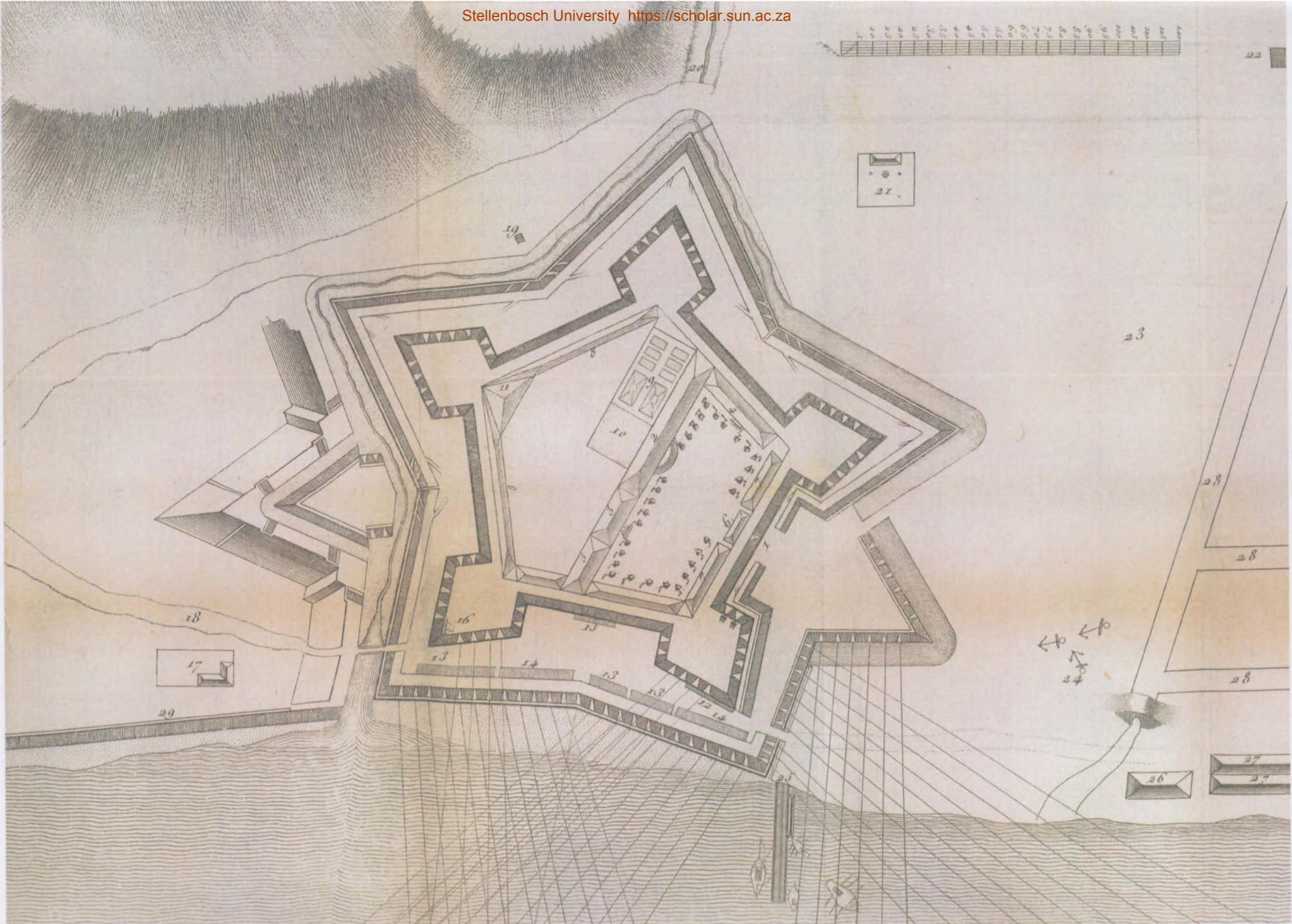




13. Chart by E. Lucas showing the capture of the Dutch ships in Saldanha, 16 - 17 August 1796

14. Interpretation of the Lucas Chart

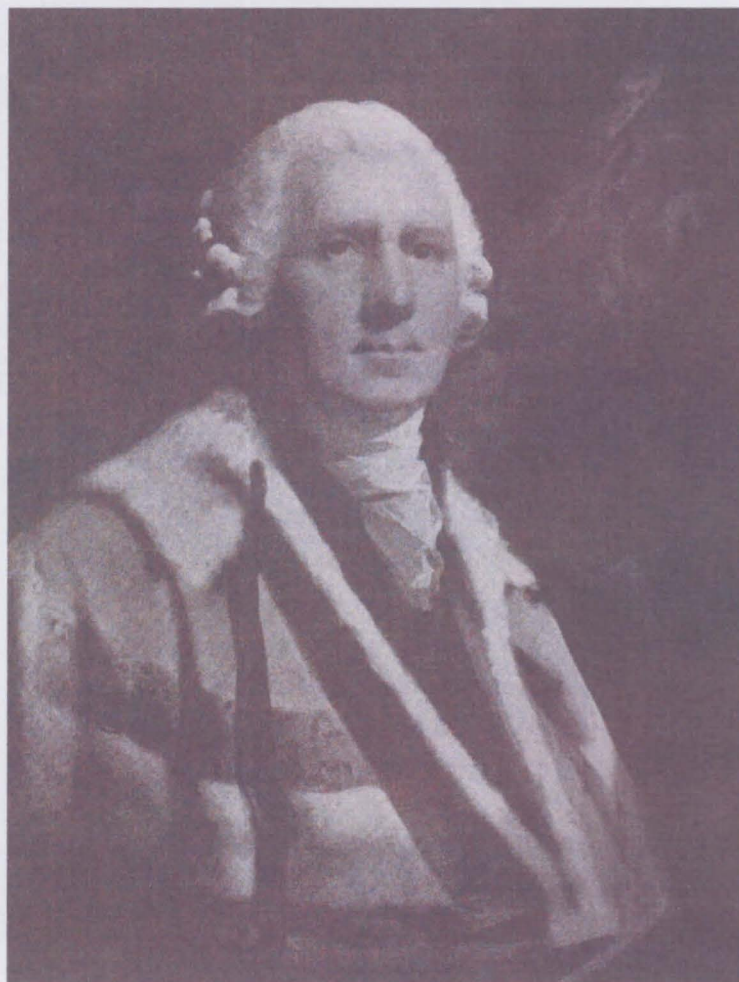




15. Map showing the arc's of fire from the Castle and the *Couvre face* Imhoff, 1793



16. Vice Admiral Sir George Keith Elphinstone (later Viscount Keith)



17. Henry Dundas (later Viscount Melville)



18. Grand Parade and the Great Barracks seen from the Castle, 1797



19. Frigate action, circa 1800

PART V

GETTING IT RIGHT: DEFENCE OF THE CAPE DURING
THE FIRST BRITISH OCCUPATION

*Chapter 9***THE DEFENCE OF THE CAPE AND THE DUTCH CHALLENGE TO THE BRITISH CONTROL OF THE CAPE, 1795-1796****1. INTRODUCTION**

The effect politics and politicians had on strategy in the history of war at sea are big. During war politics must support and guide strategy by making alliances and negotiating with strong powers to create a situation in which strategy can gain. Politics provide the objectives naval forces must achieve, which sometimes provide naval commanders with little leeway and only the opportunity to make tactical decisions. Often however, naval command in the eighteenth century was demanding in the sense that commanders had to have a clear strategic grasp and had to be able to make independent command decisions as communications with higher headquarters was slow or difficult. They had to manage fluctuating strategic and operational variables and had to make command decisions that could impact on the grand strategy of states. Such command was not easy as it required special knowledge, good intuition, intelligence, and reason – indeed it can even be seen as an art to be mastered. To command and motivate people in war is an extremely complicated process and successful practitioners of the art of command were "a special breed of men, distinguished by strength, will and [often] flair".¹ The events that occurred at the Cape in 1796, discussed in this chapter, illustrated just how independent naval command, good commanders and proper decisions influenced the fortunes of states in war.

The British strategic position was clear; to them the Cape was important as "a point of security connected with our Indian trade and settlements" and also as "a territorial acquisition".² Consequently the defence of the Cape was a high priority to the British Government as Dundas resolved that "No foreign power, directly or indirectly, should obtain possession of the Cape of Good Hope, for, that it was the physical guarantee of the British territories in India".³

¹ M. Blumenson and J.L. Stokesbury, *Masters of the Art of Command*, p.x.

² J. Barrow, *Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, I, p.vi.

³ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, p.150.

Even as the British planned to conquer the Cape, they already decided that warships had to be stationed at the Cape for its protection and to resist any enemy attempts to obtain it, as Dundas explained: "assisting in its defence as well as for intercepting any ships or troops of the enemy which may attempt to force their way into that place ..."⁴ A clear grasp of, and emphasis on, the role of naval forces in defence against maritime power projection. British commitment was obvious: defend the Cape for the Empire, while the first line in that defence must be the Royal Navy.

In contrast, the strategy of the new Batavian Republic was not that clear. They resolved to recapture the Cape – with French assistance if possible. An expedition was equipped and despatched. Yet, the expedition was too insignificant in terms of its warships and troops to succeed. In addition the Batavian Government was weak, not capable of enforcing proper naval policy, and did not provide reasonable strategic objectives. This resulted in the devastation of its navy. The well-known Dutch maritime historian, Milo, referred to the period, after the creation of the Batavian Republic and the inglorious events surrounding the history of the Dutch Navy, as "... dit tragische tijdperk ... hadden groot bressen geslagen in het korps zee-officieren".⁵

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the British defence of the Cape in the face of a threat. It will commence with the establishment of British authority at the Cape, thereafter the war in the East as well as the demise of the VOC will be discussed. The focus will then move to the Dutch expedition, the British preparations to defend the Cape and the surrender of the Dutch force. Finally, the conduct of the various commanders involved will be evaluated.

2. GENERAL CRAIG'S CONTROL OF THE CAPE AND ITS DEFECE

2.1. Administration and Governance

In the British opinion the defence of the Cape was part of the defence of the empire: it was not only important as a gateway to India, but it was also important as a naval base. Naval bases served the interest of whole empires and were strategically important to support and maintain the warships that had to defend empires. It enabled navies to conduct operations in distant seas and loosing a base could have a crippling effect on the maritime defence of an empire, or part of

⁴ NAUK WO6/20, Secretary of State Entry Book, Dundas – Blankett, 16/2/1795, pp.3-4.

⁵ T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche en Fransche Republieken van 1795 tot 1797 in Verband met de Expeditie van Schout bij Nacht E. Lucas naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, pp.iii and v-vi.

it.⁶ After the British took control of the Cape, they were quick to utilise it and between 20 November 1795 and 6 April 1796, nineteen of the 49 ships to visit the Cape were British.⁷ At the same time the naval squadron stationed at the Cape was engaged in operations in the East, the southern oceans and the Indian Ocean. To ensure the Cape for the Empire though, British control at the Cape first had to be placed on a secure footing.

As it was uncertain if the Cape should be administered as a territorial possession of the EEIC or not; it became a dependency of the crown that had to be administered by the Executive Power.⁸ Immediately after the British conquest the business of government administration commenced. The British commanders proclaimed on 19 September that they had to utilise “sundry slaves and blakks ... in several purposes of labour in the navy & army ...” as they needed extra labour to assist with taking over the defence and administration of the Cape. At the same time they also quelled rumours that the British will ill-treat the locals or plunder their property.⁹ A few days later (22 September) they proclaimed that the Cape was now “under the protection of the King of Great Britain ...”.¹⁰ As it needed a normal government all officials that held civil offices had to give in their names so that the bureaucracy, from revenue to the courts, could function.

On 7 October 1795 another British proclamation stated that “His Britannic Majesty” was now the “sole and only lawful sovereign to whom all persons residing in the Colony owe allegiance and fidelity”.¹¹ This effectively implied that all persons wishing to stay in the colony had to swear an oath of allegiance to the British King. Some problems were initially experienced, but generally the process went well. As the British represented the greatest empire of the time, and as a powerful British force with resolute commanders were available, many of the senior officials and revolutionary minded burghers in and around Cape Town were easily influenced not to resist, but to rather work with the British. Elphinstone wrote to Dundas on 12 October that the most respectable inhabitants, a much greater number than they expected, had taken the oath.¹²

⁶ H.W. Richmond, *Imperial Defence and Capture at Sea in War*, pp.108-9.

⁷ NAUK WO1/325, Cape of Good Hope, A list of the arrivals of ships in Table Bay and their sailing since the Departure of the Honourable Sir George Keith Elphinstone, 20/11/95 – 6/4/1796, p.145.

⁸ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, pp.147-9.

⁹ NAUK WO1/324, Cape of Good Hope 1795, Proclamation by Clarke, Elphinstone and Craig, 19/9/1795, pp.435-6.

¹⁰ NAUK WO1/324, Proclamation. Address of his Britannic Majesty's officers to the worthy and respectable inhabitants of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, 22/9/1795, pp.439-40.

¹¹ CA BO180, Proclamations, Clarke, Elphinstone and Craig, 7/10/1795, pp.21-3.

¹² NAUK WO1/324, Elphinstone – Dundas, 12/10/1795, p.5.

On 15 November Elphinstone and Clarke sailed for India. In their capacity as Commanders-in-Chief, they appointed Craig as "Commandant to regulate all matters civil and military ...and administration of the affairs of this Colony".¹³ Elphinstone also organised for the revenues to be taken in, and appointed the former Dutch officials, Rhenius, Brandt and Baumgardt in this capacity. They left the troops with Craig, to assist him in the defence of the Cape, while Blankett was the senior naval officer in Elphinstone's absence.¹⁴

The deep divisions that existed amongst the white population before the British conquest did not recede and Craig had to manage it. He had no illusions about the attitudes of most of the colonists towards British authority and since he had to defend the Cape against a possible threat from the sea, this was a concern. He wrote a week after the occupation that "... it is certain that the great Body of People are at this moment infected with the rankest poison of Jacobinism ... except about half a dozen merchants or principle people in this Town, nearly every man in the Colony is our enemy, and should a French force appear tomorrow, I have not a doubt that every assistance would be given to it, that the fears of the people would permit. The Burghers from the Country would join them, and not one in the Town would assist us".¹⁵

Other British officials were also worried about the "spirit of Jacobinism", but generally thought that the advantages of British control would change attitudes. Clarke wrote that "a steady perseverance of conduct and new regulation" by the British were necessary.¹⁶ Blankett described the burgher population as an ignorant, proud, prejudiced and naturally "tenacious" people. He believed that their attitude to British control will change over time, but that the Cape needed "rather a civil than a military" government, as the people "are averse to a military government, conceiving it inimical to the interests of commerce".¹⁷ Barrow made very little positive remarks about the burgher population of the Cape and referred to them as "misguided people of the colony" who "embraced the principles of Jacobinism..." and as a result the Cape was "of too great importance to be trusted in the hands of the Dutch colonists".¹⁸

By the end of December 1795 Craig wrote to Henry Dundas that he hoped he had dispelled the spirit of Jacobinism. A number of citizens must be watched, but they were not

¹³ NAUK WO1/324, Clarke and Elphinstone – Craig, 30/9/1795, p.431 and Elphinstone – Dundas, 12/10/1795, pp.3-4.

¹⁴ W.G. Perrin (ed), *Keith Papers*, I, p.223.

¹⁵ CA BO146, Letter Book, Craig – Dundas, 22/9/1795, pp.37-40.

¹⁶ BL MS061/1, J. Barrow, *Sketches of the Political and Commercial History of the Cape of Good Hope*, Part 1, *Geographical Description of the Cape of Good Hope and Progress of the Dutch in Forming it into a Settlement*, p.51.

¹⁷ BL MS211, Blankett –Dundas, 9/10/1795.

¹⁸ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, pp.144-5.

dangerous, except in the event of an enemy attack on the Cape.¹⁹ In the interior it was not the same. Due to problems in Swellendam (they called a national convention and dismissed the Landdrost), Craig had reinstated the former Landdrost, which he believed had calmed the situation. At Graaff Reinet however, many did not want to submit to British control and despite Craig's efforts to gain their trust, by the end of 1795 numerous individuals in the district maintained that they were still Dutch subjects and loyal to their oath of allegiance to the States-General. Perhaps their attitude was strengthened by news of the creation of the Batavian Republic and rumours concerning possible assistance from France and the Netherlands.

Craig explained to Dundas that Graaff Reinett was important to the colony, as it was the great red meat magazine of the Cape.²⁰ He stopped their supply of ammunitions and appointed a new Landdrost, F.R. Bresler (the previous Landdrost, H.C.D. Maynier, was chased away). Many burghers now refused to supply meat to the British before they had received ammunition, clothing and other necessities. They took the British Flag down (hoisted at Graaff-Reinet on 22 February 1796), refused the oath of allegiance and sent Bresler packing on 25 March.²¹ Bresler, a former VOC Lieutenant, was off course one of De Lille's officers at Muizenberg. Thibault thought he had "sold himself to the British, a friend of Colonel De Lille and as cowardly as the latter".²²

Though Craig did much to strengthen the trust between his government and the colonists, he was convinced that the solution was in enforcing British authority and wrote to Dundas that military power would do more than all "... the indulgences and advantages which His Majesty's Goodness or the Wisdom of His Ministers can procure for these people".²³ After six months of British control the situation in Graaff-Reinet was still not resolved and Craig's opinion was unchanged as he wrote to Dundas: "It is to be hoped that time may bring them to a more favourable way of thinking with respect to His Majesty's Government, but at this moment I am persuaded that we owe their obedience solely to their inability to resist the force here, and that it would cease, the instant a prospect was held up to them, of the protection of a greater force".²⁴ As a soldier Craig therefore thought since the "indulgences and advantages which His Majesty's Goodness" could produce had failed, military power would consolidate British

¹⁹ NAUK WO 1/324, Cape of Good Hope 1795, Craig – Dundas, 27/12/1795, pp.552-6.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind*, pp.49-52.

²² H. R. de Puyfontaine, H., *Louis Michel Thibault, 1750-1815*, p.15n.

²³ CA BO146, Letter Book, Craig – Dundas, 14/2/1796, p.98.

²⁴ CA BO146, Letter Book, Craig – Dundas, 8/3/1796, p.109.

authority.²⁵ Craig insisted on a stronger force to keep the peace at the Cape and to stop an attack from the sea. A stronger British military presence would also create greater calm in the interior, as it would quell rumours that it would be easy to reoccupy the Cape.²⁶

The unrest in the Graaff-Reinet area continued. As Craig was unwilling to send too many troops to the Eastern frontier, because he feared a Dutch-French assault on the Cape and did not wish to weaken his force, he dispatched a force of 300 troops under Major Fielder King to Stellenbosch on 14 March to prevent the rebellion from spreading to the west. He also warned if a revolt broke out in the interior, offenders would be charged under martial law. Craig also hoped that blocking the ammunition supply to the frontier and creating a Khoi military unit would end the revolt in Graaff-Reinet.²⁷ However, before he could give his undivided attention to the problems in the Graaff-Reinet district, he first had to make sure the Cape was properly secured against a possible Dutch-French onslaught.

2.2. Improving the Defence of the Cape

As the British wished to establish their authority firmly the Cape was placed under the military rule of Craig and they immediately commenced with a planning process to place defence on a more effective footing.²⁸ After reviewing the VOC defences, they deduced that the Dutch fortifications were inadequate mainly because many were not strong permanent structures, the Dutch garrison was too small and the soldiers were not reliable enough because of the poor pay the regular troops of the VOC received and hence “their allegiances could not be supposed either strong or permanent”.²⁹ A bigger British garrison than originally anticipated was therefore necessary (a garrison of 5000 was required) as much reliance could not be placed on the Khoi or “the irregular Hottentots”, while the burghers could not be relied upon for defence because they might support a Dutch or French force if it appeared. General Clarke did, however, suggest in November 1795 that the British should consider using the “younger branches” of the Cape families in “civil and military capabilities as the most effectual means of conciliating the

²⁵ CA BO146, Letter Book, Craig – Dundas, 14/2/1796 and 8/3/1796, pp.95-8, 107-11.

²⁶ H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind*, p.55.

²⁷ S.F.N. Gie, ‘The Cape Colony under Company Rule, 1708-1795’ in E.A. Walker (ed), *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, p.178.

²⁸ H.J. van Aswegen, *History of South Africa to 1854*, p.156.

²⁹ BL MS061/1, J. Barrow, *Sketches of the Political and Commercial History of the Cape of Good Hope*, Part 4, Military Establishment of the Cape of Good Hope, 1796, p.197.

Inhabitants to the British Government”,³⁰ but nothing came of it at this stage. Another priority was to strengthen the advances towards Cape Town, specifically along the slopes of Devil's Peak a number of new fortifications had to be created.³¹

Craig was concerned about the prospects of effectively defending the Cape and complained to Clarke about it. As he was convinced that the burghers would join a French force, if it arrived, he urged Clarke not to leave former VOC soldiers at the Cape. He also stressed the insufficient fortifications and the fact that in such a vast country, many possible landing sites existed.³² Craig believed an important part of the solution was in good fortifications with extensive detached works, but it was not possible to construct the comprehensive defensive works necessary in a short time and before a threat might arise. If an enemy attacked the Cape with “vigour”, the issue had to be “decided by the event of a Battle” and an enemy that performed amphibious landings must be attacked “vigorously before he has time to strengthen himself, to land his artillery, or even recover from the effects of a long voyage”.³³ Craig therefore emphasised a large garrison to counter an immediate threat, while the improvement of the system of fortifications commenced and had to continue. It seems that in their approach to defence, the British had learned a few lessons from the poor VOC defence of the Cape.

2.2.1. Artillery and Fortifications

One of the first things Craig did was to order his engineering officers to draw up a complete inventory of all the fortifications, magazines and buildings formally in the possession of the VOC. The inventory was an all-inclusive and insightful list of what existed by 1795 and referred to the inferior quality of many of the hastily erected temporary, or “transitory”, fortifications, yet it contained little detail on specific fortifications and was not an evaluation of the relative worth of the various fixed defences.³⁴

Craig wrote to Dundas that he regarded the ordinance at the different batteries as quite considerable and essential for the defence of the Cape.³⁵ In fact the “quantity of ordinance found was so great, as not only equal to supply the batteries, but to enable General Craig to

³⁰ CA BO222, Sketches of the Political and Commercial History of the Cape of Good Hope, Military Establishment of the Cape of Good Hope, p.197.

³¹ BL MS061/1, J. Barrow, Sketches ... 4, Military Establishment 1796, pp.207-10.

³² NAUK WO1/323, Cape of Good Hope, Craig – Clarke, 26/9/1795, pp.754-5.

³³ *Ibid.*; and WO1/324, Craig –Dundas, 27/12/1795, pp.899 and 902.

³⁴ NAUK WO1/324, Inventory of Dutch East India Company Houses, Fortifications Estates etc, No (1), 12/10/1795, pp.13-20.

³⁵ NAUK WO1/324, Craig – Dundas, 27/12/1795, pp.556-8.

issue a part for the use of the Navy".³⁶ Regarding the field artillery the British also placed it on a more secure footing as it was inadequate for the duties of the Cape Garrison had to perform.³⁷ In December 1795 Major York of the Royal Artillery became the new artillery commander at the Cape and the artillery received good barracks in the Castle.³⁸

On taking over the administration of the Cape, Craig warned Dundas that crucial and immediate construction and improvement work on fortifications must be done. It will be expensive because a shortage of good construction materials and equipment (specifically timber, iron and tools) existed at the Cape. Craig stressed that temporary fortifications was not the answer and that he also had to create accommodation for the garrisons of the various forts as they could not stay in tents.³⁹

Craig's improvement projects commenced with the fortifications around Cape Town. He had no confidence in the French Lines and wished to secure the exposed flank along the slopes of Devil's Peak. As a result a redoubt and two blockhouses were immediately constructed, but due to its urgency, the blockhouse was constructed of dry masonry. It seems that by the end of 1796, as work on the permanent structures continued, the *York Battery* or blockhouse as well as two other temporary redoubts were already in use along the slopes of Devil's Peak.⁴⁰

In Table Bay Craig added new fortifications and improved the existing fortifications. One of the first projects he undertook was the *Craig's Tower and Battery*, which had to replace the derelict *Nieuwe Battery* at the mouth of the Salt River. The *Craig's Battery* was a half moon shaped barbette battery and was originally armed with six Dutch 18-pounders. It was open to the rear and contained a blockhouse, *Craig's Tower*, with a bomb proof magazine.⁴¹ Craig also recognised the usefulness of the *Couvre face Imhoff*, or the *Imhoff Battery* as the British referred to it, and armed it with 27 18-pounders (besides the 24-pounders it had). At the same time he strengthened *Fort Knokke* by adding two additional 24-pounders.⁴²

Craig was well aware of the lacking defences of False Bay and Simon's Bay and paid much attention to improving it as soon as possible. The battlements on the road between Simon's Town and Muizenberg were improved and were armed with six guns. In Muizenberg the existing battery was immediately improved and breastworks were constructed on the heights

³⁶ BL MS061/1, J. Barrow, Sketches ... 4, Military Establishment 1796, p.207.

³⁷ NAUK WO1/323, Clarke – Dundas, 11/10/1795, p.762.

³⁸ NAUK WO1/324, Craig – Dundas, 27/12/1795, pp.556-8; and R. Renshaw, *Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope...*, p.31.

³⁹ NAUK WO1/324, Craig – Dundas, 27/12/1795, pp.899-901.

⁴⁰ How far work had progressed at this stage is uncertain, and the above is deduced from the Craig-Blankett correspondence, 1795 and 1796, in WO1/325, Cape of Good Hope. See Table 9.

⁴¹ U. Seeman, *Fortifications of the Cape Peninsula*, p.54.

above Muizenberg to secure the pass. By 1796 the Muizenberg position was armed with five guns and during the next four years, another three fortifications were added.⁴³

As part of his improvements of the defences of Simon's Bay, Craig had a large powder magazine (that could store 980 vats) erected to store gunpowder for the navy close to the *Boetselaar Battery*. The *Boetselaar* was renamed the *South Battery* and the *Zoutman* became the *North Battery*. To defend the magazine and the rear of the *South Battery*, a circular *Martello Tower* was erected and completed within four months after the British conquest. British interest in the *Martello Tower* and its exceptional reputation dates from 1794 when at Cape Mortella, in Corsica, two British warships, *Fortitude* (74) and *Juno* (32), were repulsed with 62 casualties after they exchanged fire for more than two hours with a small circular tower armed with only two guns and with a garrison of 20 sailors and two grenadiers.⁴⁴ During the Napoleonic wars, with Britain threatened by invasion, altogether 103 *Martello Towers* were erected along the coast of Britain and Ireland. Though the *Martello Tower* in Simon's Bay was of strong construction (12,5m in diameter, 7,85m high and 1,83m thick walls), with a strong wooden roof that could support guns, the record indicate that it was never armed with artillery.⁴⁵

Craig also attended to the other fortifications around the peninsula. In 1796 the northern battery in Kamptz Bay (now called Camps Bay) and the battlement at Kloofnek were rebuilt and their armament was bolstered with two 36-pounder carronades.⁴⁶ The defence of Hout Bay was important to the British and they constructed an expensive blockhouse on the difficult terrain above the *East Fort*. Guns and equipment of the *West Fort* were moved to the blockhouse at the *East Fort*.⁴⁷ By 1797 the *East Fort* had a blockhouse with a powder magazine and below it was the battery with five 18-pounders on circular platforms.⁴⁸ The *West Fort* was abandoned shortly afterwards. (For an account of the armament of the various batteries and redoubts around the Cape Peninsula by the middle of 1796, see Table 9.)⁴⁹

⁴² G. de Vries and J. Hall, *The Muzzle Loading Cannon of South Africa*, p.21.

⁴³ U.A. Seemann, *Fortifications of the Cape Peninsula*, pp.73-81.

⁴⁴ H.C. Wills, *Die Martellotoring, Simonstad*, pp.2 and 6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ G. de Vries and J. Hall, *The Muzzle Loading Cannon of South Africa*, p.23.

⁴⁷ CA VC81, Craig – Dundas, 14/4/1796.

⁴⁸ CA A33/1, Abstract of work performed at the Fortifications, Hout Bay, 19/10/1797.

⁴⁹ The table was compiled from the correspondence between Craig and Blankett during 1795 and 1796 in WO1/325, Cape of Good Hope.

Table 9: Armament of the batteries around the Cape Peninsula (middle 1796) ⁵⁰		
Location	Name of fortification	Number of guns
T a b l e B a y	Citadel (Castle)	60
	Imhoff Battery	27
	Elizabeth Battery	5
	Helena Battery	4
	Charlotte Battery	10
	Tulbagh Battery	5
	Riebeeck Battery	5
	Fort Knokke	19
	Craig's Tower	6
	Rogge Bay Battery	14
	Amsterdam Battery	38
	Chavonnes Battery	36
	Kyk in die pot Battery	4
	Groote Mouille Battery	8
	Petit Mouille Battery	2
	Between Table Mount and Lion's Head	8
	Hollandse Redoubt	8
	Line between Hollandse and Centre Redoubt	3
	Centre Redoubt	8
	Line between Centre and Burgher's Redoubt	2
	Burgher's Redoubt	6
	Height at Burgher's Redoubt	2
	York Redoubt and Battery	5
	Tower and Battery above York Redoubt	4
	Tower and Battery under Devil's Hill	4
Cape Peninsula	Simons Bay South	5
	Simon's Bay North	4
	Elk Bay	2
	Fish Hoek	2
	Kalk Bay	2
	Muizenberg	5
	Hout Bay	5
	Camps Bay Battery	5
Total Guns		322

2.2.2. Garrison and Troops

Craig was not happy about the accommodation for the troops. Though the barracks at the Cape was a very large and commodious building that was improved during the Fourth-Anglo Dutch War and could accommodate 3000 men, or three British regiments, it was in need of repairs by

⁵⁰ The table was compiled from the correspondence between Craig and Blankett during 1795 and 1796 in WO1/325, Cape of Good Hope.

the time the British took over.⁵¹ VOC soldiers provided their own bedding and equipment, with the result that the British experienced a big shortage of garrison furniture, blankets, pots and kettles. Many soldiers became ill (not fatally) probably due to the fact that they had to sleep on the bare flagstones of the barracks and perhaps also as a result of the climate and the effect of the wine – as they were “unaccustomed to either”.⁵² Craig went to much trouble to secure a large supply of furniture, bedding and utensils of every kind and after it arrived, the health of the troops improved.⁵³

Craig complained to both Clarke and Dundas that the illness had reduced the strength of the Garrison to 2600 rank and file as 350 men were unfit for service (either ill, old or from other defects). This effectively meant if he had to leave a guard in the city, he would only be able to meet an enemy with 2000 men from the four regiments he had. In contrast he supposed that an enemy would not dare to attack the Cape with confidence if they had less than 3500 or 4000 men, however, it all depended on the state of the enemy force after a long voyage at sea.⁵⁴ Craig requested immediate reinforcements in the form of cavalry and another infantry regiment.⁵⁵

When the 1st Battalion of the 78th Regiment arrived at the Cape on 31 May 1796 the regiment was consolidated (the 2nd Battalion sailed with Craig in February 1795) and it now mustered 1150 men (excluding the officers).⁵⁶ In addition the 19th, 33rd and 80th Regiments that arrived at the Cape not long after its capture were “composed of remarkably fine men in the highest state of discipline”.⁵⁷ Percival stated that when these regiments arrived the Dutch realised that the Cape was conquered by newly raised regiments with raw young men and boys, and not regiments of old veteran soldiers. Many of the Cape citizens “held down their heads abashed and walked off the parade when they first came to see the troops who had conquered them”.⁵⁸

The organisation of the British Army was consistent with the European patterns of the day. Each battalion in British infantry regiments had about fifty to sixty grenadiers attached to it. These men were selected from the strongest and tallest men and they wore high mitre-shaped

⁵¹ BL MS061/1, J. Barrow, Sketches ... 4, Military Establishment 1796, p.205.

⁵² WO 1/324. Cape of Good Hope 1795. Craig – Dundas, 27/12/1795, pp.563-71.

⁵³ BL MS061/1, J. Barrow, Sketches ... 4, Military Establishment 1796, p.194.

⁵⁴ BL MS061/1, J. Barrow, Sketches ... 4, Military Establishment 1796, p.204.

⁵⁵ NAUK WO1/323, Craig – Clarke, 26/9/1795, pp.755-6; and WO1/324, Craig – Dundas, 27/12/1795, pp.907-8.

⁵⁶ W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa 1795-1895*, p.11.

⁵⁷ R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, p.309.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

grenadier's caps, which gave them still greater length.⁵⁹ In accordance with the tactical developments of the time, more emphasises was placed on skirmishers and light infantry. From 1771 onwards, a light company was therefore added to every British infantry regiment. Their uniforms were somewhat more comfortable as they wore shorter jackets and leather caps.⁶⁰ Both the grenadiers and the light companies often operated as light infantry during operations. The regular infantry were armed with the *Brown Bess* (Tower Musket) and bayonets and were trained in the tactics of the line, with much emphasis on discipline and drill.

The British were convinced that they would face strong opposition from the burghers in case of an attack on the Cape. As a result they had to act "strong and sudden" against an attacker and prevent him from foraging or making contact with any of the "numerous friends which he will have in the country". But the colony had such a long coastline which made it impossible to prevent an enemy from landing. Craig regarded light cavalry as crucial for defence and wrote to Dundas that he required between two and three hundred light cavalymen to patrol the long coastline, prevent an enemy from landing and to deploy as a mobile force to trouble spots. Cavalry would also be valuable to control the colony in case of a revolt. Enough horses were available at the Cape, but they required lighter saddles as the Cape horses were generally smaller in stature.⁶¹ An enemy that landed away from Cape Town, must immediately be deprived of horses and cattle, as it is difficult and slow to manoeuvre in a country which "for miles around is a barren sandy desert". Craig patriotically added that only British sailors were "capable of dragging guns and ammunition" like they did during the advance from Muizenberg.⁶² He had certainly learned from his recent campaign.

The 8th Light Dragoons arrived at the Cape in 1796 and at the time of the Lucas expedition (August 1796) a number of cavalry units were temporarily at the Cape. By the beginning of 1797 the cavalry force still consisted of about 860 light and heavy dragoons.⁶³ Many were, however, destined for the East.

⁵⁹ W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa 1795-1895*, p.12.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ NAUK WO1/324, Craig – Dundas, 27/12/1795, pp.903-5. The so-called "Cape Horse" was smaller in stature than the European cavalry horses of the time.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ NAUK WO1/178, Memorandum, Projected Expedition from the Cape against South America, 19/1/1797, pp.105-7.

2.2.3. Creating a Khoi Unit

British colonial authorities usually raised local units to assist with defence, like for example the *sepoys* in India. As the British knew the *Pandoer Corps* gave the VOC valuable military service and that armed Khoi participated in the commando's in the interior, they were convinced of the value of such a unit. They initially thought they would not be able to rely on the loyalty of the Khoi and did not immediately raise such a regiment.⁶⁴ However, as they did not want to deploy large numbers of British soldiers to the interior because their emphasis was on defending the Cape against an attack from the sea, they considered recruiting a local regiment from the black population in the Eastern Cape, or even from the Muslim inhabitants of Bengal.⁶⁵ Nothing came from this. By the end of February 1796 Craig decided to establish a Khoi corps. He wrote to Dundas that he had both political and military objectives with it as they would assist with the defence of the Cape in case of an attack from the sea, but even more important, they would be used to threaten the rebellious colonists in the interior as “Nothing I know would intimidate the Boors of the Colony more”.⁶⁶ Needless to say, the most important reason for creating the Khoi corps was therefore political in nature: to create a wedge between the burghers and the Khoi population would be of great value to the British, as it would limit the possibilities of combined insurrection in the colony – the divide and rule principle.⁶⁷ However, this did little to improve relations between the burghers and the British, and was not a reconciliatory measure at all.

Craig placed much emphasis on the fact that the local Khoi and Khoi of mixed blood could rely on British protection and he ordered Major King to create a “Hottentot Corps” of 200 to 300 soldiers.⁶⁸ Men had to sign on for one year's service and King had to promote the idea amongst the Khoi Captains. The British promised that the soldiers would receive good clothing and weapons, the same food and liquor ration as the British soldiers and that they would not be sent overseas. Recruitment went well: by 12 April they had between 40-50 new recruits and by the end of August 171 Khoi soldiers were already under arms.⁶⁹ A number of burghers were unhappy and complained that some of their labourers deserted to join the corps. Craig

⁶⁴ CA BO222, Sketches of the Political and Commercial History of the Cape of Good Hope, Military Establishment of the Cape of Good Hope, pp.197-8.

⁶⁵ CA BO223, Plans for the Government and Trade of the Cape of Good Hope... promote the Commercial Prosperity of the British Empire, The Military Branch, pp.58 and 60-1.

⁶⁶ CA BO146, Letter Book, Craig – Dundas, 12/4/1796, p.113.

⁶⁷ W.M. Freund, 'Die Kaap onder Tussentydse Regerings, 1795-1814' in H. Giliomee and R. Elphick (eds), *'n Samelewing in Wording*, p.345.

⁶⁸ CA A455, Henry Dundas Collection, Craig – King, 14/3/1796, Appendix 22.

maintained that they had the freedom to choose. These soldiers, he stated, were “contented [and] grateful for the treatment they now receive”.⁷⁰

Within nine months the corps mustered around 300. Craig ordered 400 uniforms with blue trousers, red jackets, cotton shirts and leather caps to be made. The jackets had yellow cuffs, red-and-white lining and white buttons. The soldiers had to make their own leather shoes. Craig thought these soldiers were neat and intelligent, and he was impressed by the way they took care of their equipment. Their uniforms however, wore quickly and they were prohibited to put fat onto their bodies while they were ordered to often wash with water.⁷¹ Craig ascribed the fact that their clothing suffered much to “their ignorance of the means of preserving it ...”.⁷² King later attached humanitarian objectives to the creation of such as corps, as he stated it served as an example of the trust between the Khoi population and the British, and he wanted to alleviate the yoke of the “stupid and cruel burghers” on the Khoi people.⁷³

2.2.4. Seaward Defence of Table Bay

Relations between Craig and Blankett were specifically strained and though it is uncertain why, it might have to do with the embarkation of Craig and the 78th Regiment on Blankett’s ships. Nevertheless, after Elphinstone left for India, Blankett and Craig were in combined control of the defence of the Cape and they seemed to have cooperated well as far as their defence responsibility was concerned. In order to properly prepare the defence of the Cape, Craig asked Blankett in November 1795 to provide him with a great deal of nautical information. His concerns included the Table Bay anchorage and he wanted to know if it was possible for a large convoy to safely anchor out of reach of the heavy guns of the fortifications, could a fleet anchor outside the anchorage between Green Point and Salt River, at Robben Island, or opposite Blaauw Berg, and also, how close ships of the line and frigates could approach the various batteries?⁷⁴

Blankett did his homework. He answered Craig in two letters during March and despatched a “Report on the Defence Matters” to Britain. He stated that ships can anchor all over the bay out of gunshot, specifically in calm weather. Big ships could approach to within 450

⁶⁹ H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind*, p.56.

⁷⁰ J. de Villiers, *Hottentot-Regimente aan die Kaap*, pp.87-93.

⁷¹ J. de Villiers, *Hottentot-Regimente aan die Kaap*, pp.98-99.

⁷² J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, pp.49-50.

⁷³ CA A455, Henry Dundas Collection, King – Henry Dundas, 1/11/1798, appendix 22.

⁷⁴ NAUK WO1/325, Craig – Blankett, 29/11/1795, pp.127-131.

metres from Green Point, and as ships could anchor in safety off Green Point (specifically in summer months when southerly winds prevail), heavy guns and mortars at Green Point were important to prevent a force from putting boats in the water and conducting amphibious landings. Such landings would, however, require a considerable force to cover it.⁷⁵

The distances Blankett estimated differed between his first letters and his final report. However, he stated that the distances he accepted were greater than those indicated on a chart ordered by Van de Graaf in 1786, and he calculated which would be safe distances for ships to manoeuvre in, and deliver fire. The following estimated distances were given for Table Bay: ships of the line could come within 400 metres from the *Mouille Battery*, while frigates could approach to 180 metres. Opposite the *Chavonnes Battery* ships of the line could approach to 370 meters and frigates to 270 meters, while opposite the *Amsterdam Battery*, the distances were 650 metres for ships of the line and 550 metres for frigates.⁷⁶ On the eastern side of the bay, distances were greater, as ships of the line could not approach closer than 1200 metres and frigates to within 550 metres from the Castle. The danger for ships was that if they were opposite the Castle, they were at the same time right abreast of the *Amsterdam*, and literally in the crossfire.⁷⁷ Opposite the Sea Lines and *Fort Knokke* the distance was even greater; 1550 metres for ships of the line and 820 metres for frigates. Between *Fort Knokke* and the Mouth of Salt River ships of the line could only approach to 1460 metres and frigates to 730 metres.⁷⁸

Frigates could therefore easily approach close enough to support landings across the bay. Blankett however deemed a "landing impracticable along the eastern shore" of Table Bay because of the surf. He explained that boats could not individually wait for the surf during "the landing of troops in the face of resistance", as action had to be coordinated and boats had to work together. Between Salt River and Jan Biesjes Craal (in error referred to as Jan Brissions Craal) the surf was less than on other parts, but as it was still constant, landings would be risky.⁷⁹ Though it was possible to anchor in safety off Robben Island, an enemy would not gain from it, as the island had no provisions and the beach opposite the island had a rolling swell, which would make amphibious operations very difficult.⁸⁰

Blankett stated that the only season an amphibious attack in Table Bay was possible, was in summer with its southerly conditions. He suggested that gunboats were good for

⁷⁵ NAUK WO1/325. Blankett – Craig, 15/3/1796, p.135.

⁷⁶ NAUK WO55/1551/10, Report on the defence matters by Commodore Blankett, Cape of Good Hope, 1796.

⁷⁷ NAUK WO1/325, Blankett – Craig, 8/3/1796, pp.132-3.

⁷⁸ NAUK WO55/1551/10, Report on the defence matters by Commodore Blankett, 1796.

⁷⁹ NAUK WO1/325, Blankett – Craig, 15/3/1796, p.137.

additional defence of Table Bay, as warships could bypass the fortifications and perform landings elsewhere, while small gunboats could move close inshore and harass ships at anchor or boats performing amphibious landings.⁸¹

This analysis is typical of the British approach, as they had much appreciation for amphibious operations and considered the defence from the viewpoint of the attackers – having to put men ashore on a foreign coast. Their experience of maritime power projection and amphibious war, gave them good insight into what the attacker required and how to defend against such a threat.

3. THE WAR IN THE EAST AND THE DEMISE OF THE VOC

With the assistance of the various Dutch naval squadrons, Van Braam (1783-87), Sylvester (1786-89) and Staringh (1789-91), the Dutch authority in the East was bolstered. But it was not possible to save the floundering VOC as the Dutch State could not maintain its naval and military involvement in the Indies during the 1790's. A number of Dutch naval vessels did proceed to the Cape and the Indies during the early 1790's and after the war broke out in 1793, Vaillant's ships brought a VOC convoy back to Europe. The frigate *Amazoon* (36), under the command of Abraham Kuvel, arrived in Batavia in November 1793 with Commissioners-General Nederburgh and Frijkenius onboard, while the frigate *Scipio*, under the command of Cornelis de Jong van Rodenburgh, and the brig *Komeet* twice escorted ships from the Cape to Europe. A last effort to get a ship of the line to the East failed at the end of 1794: the *Brakel* (56), commanded by Gerard Oorthuys, and the frigate *Medemblik* (36), commanded by Simon Dekker, were despatched to the East in December 1794, but the *Brakel* was confiscated in Britain. When the British fleet arrived in 1795, the *Medemblik* was at the Cape, but she soon left for Batavia.⁸²

After the war broke out in 1793, the VOC was basically without defence and French privateers from Mauritius with the *l'Hirondelle* (16) and *General Dumourier* (24) immediately captured three Dutch ships. This was just the beginning and soon more French privateers (notably *Le Cybele*, *La Prudente* and other ships) were also preying on Dutch and British shipping. It was, however, not only one-sided. In 1793 a few armed VOC ships, the *Hilverbeek* (40), *Kotter Patriot* (20), *Favorite* (18) and *Chr. Columbus* (54) arrived and acted as escorts. In

⁸⁰ NAUK WO1/325, Blankett – Craig, 8/3/1796, pp.133-4; and Blankett – Craig, 15/3/1796, p.136.

⁸¹ NAUK WO1/325, Blankett – Craig, 15/3/1796, pp.138-42.

⁸² J.R. Bruijn, et al, *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping*, I, p.249.

1793 the VOC ship *Erfprins*, from Japan, even managed to fight off a French frigate of 36 guns during a two hour battle.⁸³ After the arrival of the frigate *Amazoon*, the VOC armed more of its ships and with the Commissioners-General in Batavia, the Dutch sea power in the East was now under the competent command of the Captain Frijkenius.⁸⁴ Despite the fact that Frijkenius did his utmost to secure the waters around Indonesia against French privateers, British support was essential. VOC ships cooperated with Dutch naval vessels and even with ships of the British Royal Navy. A number of battles took place and ships were constantly captured; while the Dutch even succeeded in capturing two French frigates at Surabaya in 1794. However, these ships could not be equipped due to a manpower shortage.⁸⁵

The frigate *Medemblik* arrived in Batavia on 9 August 1795 with news of events in Europe and the flight of the Stadtholder. As war with Britain broke out, they now faced a more formidable enemy in maritime terms and Batavia was effectively cut off from the Netherlands.⁸⁶ In 1795 the British China fleet was at Batavia and though the Dutch considered capturing it, contrary to the fate that befell Dutch ships in British ports, they allowed it to depart.⁸⁷

Nederburgh stated that by 1795 the defences at the VOC possessions were in a very poor state and as they had received virtually no support, they were not ready for war: "...in zeer zwakken en zorglijken staat bevonden, zonder daar toe eenige de minste ondersteuning te hebben ontvangen, noch aan Schepen, noch aan Manschappen ... als tot het voeren van den oorlog worden vereist...".⁸⁸ To top it all, the small military establishment of the VOC became even smaller as De Meuron accepted a more lucrative contract from Britain and the regiment went over into British service in 1795. The regiment was the main force the VOC had in Ceylon and the British considered it "well officered, disciplined and has long been accustomed to the climate of the islands of India".⁸⁹

The High Council in Batavia received news about the capture of the Cape from an American ship. Their attitude was that they would defend Batavia against aggression, but would not act as a belligerent. For Frijkenius it was difficult to conduct maritime defence as he received little support from the Council and apparently his colleague, Nederburgh, also worked

⁸³ IMH Milo163, *Geschiedenis van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, betreffende een opgave en beschrijving van 13 belangrijke zeeslagen, 1595-1799, pp.57-8.

⁸⁴ C. De Jong, *Reizen naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Ierland en Noorwegen*, , I, p.2.

⁸⁵ IMH Milo163, *Geschiedenis van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*..., pp.57-8.

⁸⁶ S.C. Nederburgh, *Echte Stukken betreffende het Volbragt Onderzoek* ..., pp.viii-ix and xiv.

⁸⁷ IMH Milo163, *Geschiedenis van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*..., pp.57-9.

⁸⁸ S.C. Nederburgh, *Echte Stukken betreffende het Volbragt Onderzoek* ..., p.xiv.

⁸⁹ NAUK WO1/361, H. Cleghorn, Proposal relative to the Regiment de Meuron, 14/2/1795.

against him.⁹⁰ Yet, for a while the Dutch still succeeded in maintaining a cruising squadron with two frigates and three armed VOC ships.⁹¹ Due to the revolutionary fervour, a shortage of crews and problems with payment and victuals, they soon also experienced disciplinary problems. As the condition of the ships deteriorated, the crews became disgruntled. The *Amazoon* could not be kept operational any longer and she was scrapped on 15 November 1795. Captain Kuvel returned to the Netherlands with an American ship.⁹² Somehow Dekker managed to keep his ship operational.

After the Batavian Republic took over the authority in Batavia in February 1796, many seamen were paid off, while others joined the merchant service. Frijkenius then relieved Dekker from his responsibilities and he was permitted to return to the Netherlands. Like Captains De Jong (*Scipio*) and Claris (*Komeet*), Dekker initially found it difficult to accept the Batavian Republic. After Frijkenius died on 9 June 1797, the Dutch maritime defence of the East Indies came to an end.⁹³

The infamous letter of Willem V that ordered Dutch colonial governors to place their facilities under British protection was obeyed by a few establishments – Malacca, Amboin, Padang and west Sumatra surrendered virtually without a fight. By early 1796 the British had also captured Ceylon and the Moluccas without much effort. With the assistance of French troops and by raising local troops the Dutch managed to maintain the defence of Batavia.⁹⁴ The last French post in India, Pondicherry, was conquered with ease by the British in August 1793. No French reinforcements were available, and none that could reverse the situation was despatched from Europe.⁹⁵

As the VOC experienced severe cash flow problems since the 1780's, it became increasingly reliant on the Dutch Government for assistance. After the Batavian Republic was established the VOC was liquidated by decree in December 1795. It came to an ignominious end in February 1796, at which stage it had a shortfall of f119 055 657. The state provided a guarantee for its losses and took over all the VOC assets, placing it under the auspices of the "Comité tot de Zaken van de Oost-Indische Handel en Bezittingen".⁹⁶ The administration of the East India trade was now a function of the Batavian Government. Dutch shipping and maritime

⁹⁰ T. Roodhuyzen, *In Woelig Vaarwater*, p.129.

⁹¹ IMH Milo163, *Geschiedenis van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie...*, pp.57-9.

⁹² T. Roodhuyzen, *In Woelig Vaarwater*, p.129.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ D. De Jong, *Het Krijgswezen onder de Oostindische Compagnie*, p.177.

⁹⁵ R. Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare*, p.268.

⁹⁶ V. Enthoven, 'Van Steunpilaar tot Blok aan het been' in G. Knaap and G. Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.53.

commerce were devastated and by 1803 the VOC wharfs in Middelburg, Rotterdam, Hoorn and Enkhuizen were no longer functioning.⁹⁷

4. DUTCH-FRENCH DIPLOMACY AND THE LUCAS EXPEDITION

After the French armies captured the icebound Dutch fleet early in 1795, the new Batavian Republic started a warship building programme. As Britain had no immediate Dutch naval threat, and with the Dutch in the French camp, they grabbed the opportunity to expand the British Empire and crucial Dutch possessions came into their grasp in 1795-96.⁹⁸ The Batavian Republic wished to recapture the Cape and as Britain was consolidating her foothold on the Cape, it would involve a serious exercise in maritime power projection. Did the new Dutch government realise what it required and was the instrument that had to execute it, the new Batavian Navy, up to it?

The former Dutch naval establishment strongly supported the Orange cause ("in hart en nieren oranjegezinde"). After the political changes the five separate admiralties were consolidated into one central naval administration and the so called "Committé tot Zaken der Marine" under Pieter Paulus came into being.⁹⁹ Paulus was a former Advocate Fiscal of the Admiralty of the Maaze, but was sacked in 1787 because of his political activism. The Batavian Government reappointed many of the officers that served the previous political dispensation, but many of the officers had to leave the navy, while others refused to serve a political system that insulted them or were considered as unfriendly. Though many of the older officers enthusiastically started to build up a new navy in 1795, soon tension and distrust arose because of the politicisation of naval appointments, the revolutionary perceptions regarding discipline, resentment towards the former cliques and the close relations with the French Republic.¹⁰⁰ This effectively destroyed the "esprit de corps" in the system. With so much emphasis on the ideology of freedom, equality and fraternity, discipline was even more important than before for the maintenance of military efficacy. Interestingly enough, most of the NCO's and many of the sailors still supported the old regime, while the new officers' corps was closely linked to the new dispensation.¹⁰¹ The result was that the healthy relationship that is supposed to exist between

⁹⁷ J.I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, pp.1122 and 1127.

⁹⁸ R. Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare*, p.268.

⁹⁹ J.C. Mollema, *Geschiedenis van Nederland ter Zee*, III, pp.367-8.

¹⁰⁰ T. Roodhuyzen, *In Woelig Vaarwater*, p.133.

¹⁰¹ G.A. Geerts, *Samenwerking en Confrontatie. De Frans-Nederlandse militaire betrekkingen voornamelijk in de Franse tijd*, p.54.

officers and NCO's was not present; a factor which was even made more difficult by the fact that many of the crewmembers were foreigners.¹⁰²

Unlike the tradition of the Dutch Navy, the new officer cadre took very little initiative, political motives interfered with everything and advancement was based on political favour, not on merit. Loyal political supporters of the new regime received quick promotion and the most senior appointments. Though some of these officers were very capable, many were not up to the appointments as they lacked experience, or did not enforce the required military discipline. As Milo stated: "In geen enkel tijdperk onzer zeegeschiedenis is de passiviteit en het slaafs opvolgen van orders en instructies door onze bevelhebbers ... grooter geweest dan tijdens de Bataafsche Republiek ... Wat baatte een beroep op 'soldaat- en zeemanschap' in een tijd, die slechts politieke leuzen en onberekenbare gunst te zien gaf!"¹⁰³ Typical of such appointments was the appointment of a 34 year old former Lieutenant, Jan Willem de Winter, as Vice-Admiral and "Opperbevelhebber der Zeemacht" (Commander-in-Chief) of the Batavian Navy on his return from political exile in France in 1795. Five more Vice-Admirals and three Rear-Admirals were soon appointed, amongst them Engelbertus Lucas.¹⁰⁴

Due the commitment and vigour of Paulus, a substantial navy was soon created and equipped. Yet, it was not in all respects a happy or committed navy as it experienced problems with logistics and finances due to the loss of much know-how. Discipline was poor and the relationship between officers, NCO's and crews was bad – as Mollema stated, many of the crewmembers had "een oranje strik diep onder in zijn scheepskist verborgen".¹⁰⁵

Despite all the politics the requirements of war became evident and by the second half of 1795 the Republic realised that Dutch shipping and Dutch possessions had to be protected. Numerous maritime defence plans were designed, the government placed more emphasis on increasing its naval activities and greater protection for trade received attention.¹⁰⁶ Two squadrons were therefore equipped. The one, under the command of Vice-Admiral Van Braak, was destined for the West Indies, while the other, under the command of the Captain Lucas, was destined for the Cape.

Engelbertus Lucas was born in 1747 and first gained experience at sea on merchantmen. In 1772 he was appointed as a naval Lieutenant and during the Fourth Anglo-

¹⁰² T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, p.iv.

¹⁰³ T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, p.vii.

¹⁰⁴ J.C. Mollema, *Geschiedenis van Nederland ter Zee*, III, pp.367-8.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ T. Roodhuyzen, *In woelig vaarwater*, p.142.

Dutch War, he commanded a brig.¹⁰⁷ Between 1786 and 1789 he commanded the frigate *Scipio* in the Sylvester squadron that went to the Indies. During the voyage he stopped over at the Cape.¹⁰⁸ While in the East, Lucas participated in three of the campaigns fought to assist the VOC. In 1795 he received command of his first ship of the line, the *Dordrecht* (64). In motivation of his appointment in command of a squadron, the *Committé tot Zaken der Marine* emphasised his experience in the East and the fact that he was considered as a trustworthy and capable officer. However, Lucas had never before commanded a ship of the line, not to mention a squadron, and nothing indicated that he had above-average command or leadership abilities. The reality was that with his appointment, a substantial number of senior officers, also officers of flag rank, were passed over. Lucas was outspoken in supporting both the *Patriotten* cause and Paulus, which seemed to have been sufficient credentials.¹⁰⁹

Lucas's orders was issued by the States-General on 18 November 1795 and stipulated that the squadron had to go to the Cape of Good Hope and the East Indies, "... gedestineerd na de Caap de Goede Hoop en de Oost-Indische bezittingen..."¹¹⁰ At this stage they did not yet have certainty about the capture of the Cape. In the first article the participating ships are listed as well as the commanders. The strength of the squadron was established at three ships of the line, four frigates, one brig and one supply ship. The frigates *Amazoon* and *Medemblik*, which were either at the Cape or in the Indies, were also placed under the command of Lucas.¹¹¹ The commanders were chosen with care, as a number of them had relations at the Cape, such as Captain Claris, whose wife was still at the Cape (they got married in 1794) and two brothers, Captain-Lieutenant Valkenburg and Lieutenant Valkenburg, both born at the Cape and with family, girlfriends and friends at the Cape. Other officers, such as Rijnbende, De Cerff and Barbier, also knew the Cape and had good friends at the Cape. Two Army officers, Henry (Lieutenant-Colonel appointed as Adjutant-General) and Redelinghuis that knew the Cape well was also appointed. These officers assured the government that the local population would support them if the British controlled the Cape.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ L. Eekhout, *Het Admiralenboek. De vlagofficieren van de Nederlandse marine*, p.113.

¹⁰⁸ NAN 1.01.50 – 1189, Van de Graaff – Stadhouder, 18/4/1786, Eenige Missiven van den H^r C.J. Van de Graaff Gouverneur op Cabo de Goede Hoop.

¹⁰⁹ T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche...*, pp.9-11.

¹¹⁰ NAN 1.01.08 – 4795, Secr Res van HH Mog van 1 Jan 1795 to Ult Febr 1796. Instructie voor den kapitein ter zee E. Lucas, commandeerende s'Lands schip van oorlog *Dordrecht*, 18/11/1795, p.755. These orders, with little change is also in NAN Marine, 1795-1813, 2.01.29.01 – 442, Secrete Notulen en Bijlagen van het Committé tot de Zaken van de Marine, May – December 1795. The original is in extremely bad state, it obtained fire damage, but was restored.

¹¹¹ NAN 1.01.08 – 4795, Instructie voor den kapitein ter zee E. Lucas, Art 1, p.756.

¹¹² T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, pp.16 and 157.

Lucas was ordered to sail around Scotland and could stop either at the Canary Islands or the Cape Verde Islands to replenish and gain intelligence about enemy ship movements.¹¹³ Articles six to twelve of his orders related to the Cape and made provision for various contingencies regarding the status of the Cape. It is surprising that by the time these orders were issued, optimistic thoughts were still entertained concerning the status of the Cape as it was thought that it might actually not be in British hands. Article 9 stated if it was not in British hands, Lucas had to anchor in Table Bay and he was provided with the secret signals supposed to be in use at the Cape. If the Cape was in enemy hands, Lucas had to go to Saldanha Bay.¹¹⁴

In the *Secrete Resolutie* of States-General dated 15 December 1795, the capitulation of the Cape was reported and even the date was correctly given as 16 September. The States-General was clearly disappointed at the Cape being in the hands of the “roofzugtige en wangunstige” British and condemned the Stadtholder for his treason. The loss of the Cape was regarded as serious to both the Republic and to France, because it was regarded as the key to the East (“de sleutel van Indiën”). The British would now control the navigation to and from the East: “...geene Natie meer na de Indiën zullen mogen of kunnen navigeerén, dan dezulke, aan welke zij daartoe wel verlof zoude believen te geven”.¹¹⁵ However, the States-General knew that sea power was the first line of defence against maritime power projection and stated that the Cape was captured because of the failure of their navy: “... men is door de omstandigheden en door het geheel verval onzer Marine niet in Staat geweest, om deze Coloniën tot nu toe eenig wezentlijk secours toe te brengen ...”.¹¹⁶

The States-General originally thought the Lucas squadron was sufficient, as it was supposed to have three ships of the line, two heavy frigates, two smaller frigates, a brig and between 2000 and 2400 soldiers. They also thought it would be a match for Elphinstone’s ships, which would be in a poor condition due to constant service. By December, after news of the capitulation of the Cape arrived, it was clear that a stronger squadron than the Batavian Republic could despatch to the Cape at that stage, was required. The French were not unwilling to assist with retaking the Cape and negotiations with France commenced. Paulus wrote a memorandum to the States-General, on 15 December, stating that a French squadron of five or six ships of the line, three or four frigates and an infantry brigade with about 2400 soldiers,

¹¹³ NAN 1.01.08 – 4795, Instructie voor den kapitein ter zee E. Lucas, Art 2-4, pp.756-7.

¹¹⁴ NAN 1.01.08 – 4795, Instructie voor den kapitein ter zee E. Lucas, Art 9, p.760; and T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tussen de Bataafse...*, p.260.

¹¹⁵ NAN 1.01.08 – 4795. Secr Res van HH Mog van 1 Jan 1795 to Ult Febr 1796, 15/12/1795.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

would directly follow Lucas to assist with recapturing the Cape.¹¹⁷ The objective of the mission, according to the States-General now changed (though Lucas's orders were not altered) and they stated an attempt to retake the Cape must be made with French support: "... expeditie aan de Caap de Goede Hoop te doen tot herneeming van dat important etablissement".¹¹⁸

Lucas's orders nonetheless stated in no uncertain terms (Articles 10 and 11), if the Cape was in British hands, he had to try to recapture it with all necessary means, "... trachten dezelve door alle mogelijke middelen te hernemen ...", while if he found a British squadron at the Cape and it was necessary to do battle with it in order retake the Cape, the British squadron should be eliminated; "bevechten ... ruïneeren of ... overmeesteren". Nothing must be left to chance to recapture this important establishment: "niets onbeproefd laten om in zijn oogmerk, het weeder bemagtigen van deze gewigtige bezitting voor den Staat te slagen".¹¹⁹ Articles 12 and 13 stipulated if it was impossible for Lucas to retake the Cape due to a shortage of troops, equipment or because of other reasons, he had to proceed directly to the French islands in the Indian Ocean. He then had to discuss the matter with the French authorities, explore the possibility of retaking the Cape and establish in which way he could do most damage to the enemy, while at the same time advancing Dutch interests.¹²⁰ The rest of his orders were concerned with the command of a combined squadron, his duties in the East and the return of the squadron. Much emphasis was placed on the responsibilities of the commanders and officers, in keeping the crews exercised and the ships in a good state of operational readiness.

During the last days of 1795 the French notified the Dutch that they would not participate in the expedition to recapture the Cape due to naval deficiencies and a lack of funds. In fact they clearly stated that the Batavian Republic should carry the cost of equipping such a squadron, estimated at three million Guilders. The States-General thought that if the French abandon them like this, it would declare their naval agreements null and void, but nonetheless considered footing the bill for a French squadron. Without French support the Lucas expedition could not go ahead and the Republic would have to relinquish its possessions in the East. The value of the Cape and the impact it would have on France and the Netherlands, if Britain was master of the Cape, was emphasised and as it would lead to British control of trade in the Indian Ocean, renewed efforts were made to elicit French support.¹²¹ Dutch representatives in France

¹¹⁷ T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, pp.28 and 30-6.

¹¹⁸ NAN 1.01.08 – 4795, Secr Res van HH Mog van 1 Jan 1795 to Ult Febr 1796, 15/12/1795.

¹¹⁹ NAN 1.01.08 – 4795, Instructie voor den kapitein ter zee E. Lucas, Art 10-11, p.760.

¹²⁰ NAN 1.01.08 – 4795, Instructie voor den kapitein E. Lucas, Art 12-13, p.761.

¹²¹ See the Secr Res van HH Mog van 1 Jan 1795 to Ult Febr 1796, Secrete Resolutie van den 31/12/1795 quoted in T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tussen de Bataafsche...*, pp.272-

again reported late in January and in February that there would be no French support without money: "... zo er geen fondsen komen, is alles verloren".¹²² The States-General therefore knew that no French squadron would sail with Lucas, yet he was oblivious of this and sailed with the conviction that a French squadron was on its way!

The Lucas squadron departed from the anchorage at Texel on 23 February 1796, as part of a combined squadron with sixteen warships, under the command of Vice-Admiral A. Van Braak.¹²³ Lucas held the naval rank of Captain, acted as Commodore, while his promotion to Rear Admiral became effective at sea on 7 May 1796.¹²⁴ His squadron now consisted of the following ships and commanders: three ships of the line the *Dordrecht* (64), Captain and Commodore E. Lucas, *Revolutie* (64), Captain J. Rijnbenden and *Admiraal MH Tromp* (54), Captain Lieutenant J. Valkenburg; two large frigates the *Castor* (44), Captain J. Claris and *Braave* (40), Captain Lieutenant J. Zoeteman; two smaller frigates the *Bellona* (24), Captain Lieutenant G.A. de Falk and *Cyrene* (24), Captain Lieutenant C. de Cerff; the brig *Havik* (18), Lieutenant P. Besemer; and the supply ship (a VOC East Indiaman) *Vrouw Maria* (20), Lieutenant H. Barbier.¹²⁵ Secrecy, so important for such expeditions, was compromised and by early February the British knew that the Dutch and the French were fitting out ships. They feared the destination was the Cape or the Indies.¹²⁶ They also thought that a French squadron under Admiral De Sercey, which had left La Rochelle for Mauritius, might join forces with the Batavian squadron.

Onboard the Dutch ships were a number of idealistic revolutionary-minded Dutch Patriots that held strong convictions about the justness of the expedition. They believed that the British had unjustly taken the Cape and their cause was 'right', therefore justice would prevail. One such example was Arie Knock, an army Captain serving as Adjutant (Capitein Adjudant) on the

277. Milo stated that it was to be found in Staten-Generaal, Port.2437, but it is also not in the new file 4797, Secreete Resolutiën, where it is supposed to be.

¹²² T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, p.37.

¹²³ NAN 2.01.29.03.28, J.J. Melvill, Journaal gehouden door den ondergetekende gediend hebbende as 1^o officier, Capt en daarna als Capitein bij de Vlag onder den Schout by Nagt Engelbertus Lucas aanboord van s'Lands schip *Dordrecht* gemonteerd met 66 stukken canon bemand met 450 koppen, 5/4/1795 to 18/8/1796.

¹²⁴ L. Eekhout, *Het Admiralenboek. De vlagofficieren van de Nederlandse marine*, p.113.

¹²⁵ See NAN 2.01.29.03.44, E. Lucas, Journaal gehouden aan boord van s'Lands schip *Dordrecht* door den Capitein Engelbertus Lucas commandeerende 'slands esquader naar de Ost Indien, 25/1/1796 – 18/8/1796; A.J. Knock, *Uit Liefde voor Vaderland en Vrijheid*, p.139; and W.G. Perrin (ed), *The Keith Papers*, I, pp.452-3. The number of guns onboard the ships differ in the various accounts. In Elphinstone's account of the captured ships more guns were indicated and it seems that the British added the carronades onboard, while the Dutch did not. These figures thus were taken from the various Dutch accounts.

¹²⁶ NAUK WO1/325, War Office – Craig (Secret), 14/2/1796, p.31.

Castor. He stressed that “De Caap de Goede Hoop ... door het verraderlijk beleid van eene befaamde stadhouder in handen der snoode en roofzugtige Engelse was gevalle...”.¹²⁷ Knock's journal is typical of the viewpoints of the 'victors' after a revolution and smacks of revolutionary rhetoric and jargon. He had utter disdain for the repressiveness of the former system and the 'evil' enemy. The journal is informative, as it is a continuous account and provides insight into the fiasco, through the eyes of a junior officer inspired by the revolution. Knock unwittingly showed what a chaotic undertaking the expedition really was and why a lack of discipline existed, while he also illustrated the powerlessness and ineptitude of the military command.

The Dutch squadron continued north to a latitude of 64°N and experienced bad weather with constant heavy seas, hail and snow. The weather was so bad that by middle March the squadron had scattered.¹²⁸ Lucas then made for the Canary Islands, the rendezvous point. When he arrived at Gran Canaria on 13 April, the *Castor* was already there, as well as two British ships on a passage between Lisbon and London. His ships had suffered much in the bad weather and most were in need of repairs. It also took a long time to provision the ships because they were poorly provisioned on departure. Furthermore, much discontent existed on ships, like the *Revolutie* and *Castor*. Many men also deserted and Lucas wrote to Admiral De Winter that he had already lost more than 150 men to desertion and death – something which obviously affected the combat effectiveness of his squadron negatively.¹²⁹ Three sailors that tried to desert were court-martialled, one managed to escape, while the other two were sentenced to death and hanged on 3 May.¹³⁰ Lucas also received constant complaints from his Captains about the quality of some officers as they neglected their duties, were often drunk and were incapable of commanding men. Much time was therefore wasted by incessant squabbling amongst the officers and Lucas even stated that some of his commanders and officers, “zijn meest stomme kaerels”.¹³¹

While at Gran Canaria (probably early in May) Lucas received information from the American Consul at Madeira that a British squadron of one ship of the line, one frigate, a number of transports and 4000 troops, had departed from a British port destined for the East. On 4 May the Spanish lookout at Gran Canaria reported five ships at sea and the next morning four were visible from the harbour. It was the *HMS Jupiter* (50) and a convoy of four transports

¹²⁷ A.J. Knock, *Uit Liefde voor Vaderland en Vrijheid. Het Journaal van de Patriot Arie Johannes Knock over de Periode 1784 tot 1797*, p.136. The Journal of Arie Knock (edited by P.M. Peucker and J.P. Sigmond) makes for interesting, personalised and often emotional reading.

¹²⁸ A.J. Knock, *Uit Liefde voor Vaderland en Vrijheid*, p.140.

¹²⁹ T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, pp.159-61.

¹³⁰ A.J. Knock, *Uit Liefde voor Vaderland en Vrijheid*, p.141.

and 2000 soldiers on their way to the Cape. Lucas ordered his ships to clear for action, and though the *Dordrecht* was unable to sail as her rudder was not fitted, the captains of the other ships later testified that their ships were able to sail out, yet Lucas did not pursue.¹³² Eleven days later another large warship under the Spanish flag appeared, poked around and sailed off again. Though his Flag Captain, Melvill, considered it to be British, Lucas stated that it was Spanish. It was in fact Rear-Admiral Pringle and the *Tremendous* (74), on their way to the Cape.¹³³ Close on Pringle's heels followed his convoy, escorted by Captain Osborn with the *HMS Trident* (64). The Dutch saw some ships on the horizon, but decided not to close in. Percival, who was onboard, stated if they had, "they might have captured some of us, as we had only one line of battleships and several sail of Indiamen".¹³⁴ Lucas was offered a few opportunities – if only he was bolder!

Lucas had orders to sail for the Cape as quickly as possible. Yet, after more than a month at Gran Canaria the Batavian squadron eventually departed on 17 May.¹³⁵ On 26 May they anchored at Porto Praya. Lucas heard from the Portuguese Governor of the island that they had no French visitors, but that a British squadron consisting of one ship of the line, two frigates and a number of transport ships sailed for the Cape on 9 April. In contrast with his orders, Lucas visited both Gran Canaria and Porto Praya. The French squadron he thought he would rendezvous with was nowhere to be seen. Stubbornly he concluded that the French were ahead of him. While at Porto Praya he read in a British newspaper dated 29 March 1796, that Elphinstone and General Clarke had departed to Madras on 11 November 1795 and that much discontent existed amongst the Cape population. Logic therefore dictated that he should make haste for the Cape.¹³⁶

It was, however, an unhappy squadron and men that had tried to desert were apprehended with Portuguese assistance. In a letter Lucas wrote to his officers, dated 2 June 1796, he tried to motivate them by expressing the expectation that their mission to the Cape would be a success.¹³⁷ As they approached the Cape, Lucas called his Captains together and

¹³¹ T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, pp.161-2.

¹³² T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, pp.163-5.

¹³³ J.C. de Jonge, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Zeewezen*, V, pp.234-4.

¹³⁴ R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, p.36.

¹³⁵ J.C. de Jonge, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Zeewezen*, V, p.243.

¹³⁶ T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, p.167.

¹³⁷ IMH Milo120, Copieboek van orders en instructies door Capt. Lucas, 4/08/1795 – 14/8/1795, Aan de Officiëren, 2/6/1796.

informed them that they had to go to Saldanha Bay, while he thought that the French might be waiting for them at the Cape.¹³⁸

Lucas ordered his ships to clear for action when they approached the entrance to Saldanha Bay, in case the British had erected a battery at its entrance.¹³⁹ At 11:00 on 6 August 1796, after a voyage of more than five months, the squadron arrived at Saldanha Bay.¹⁴⁰ Hoping to find the French in Saldanha Bay, Lucas was very disappointed when the bay was empty. The promised assistance was not there, but he wrongly believed that French help would be forthcoming, making the reoccupation of the Cape a possibility.¹⁴¹ His squadron needed fresh supplies, they had little water on board, many crew members were ill and much dissent existed on a number of the ships. They were, however, quite content with being in the bay, oblivious to the inherent danger, as Lucas's secretary wrote "wij leggen hier in Abramhams-schoot".¹⁴²

5. BRITISH PREPARATIONS AND THE REINFORCEMENT OF THE CAPE

5.1. The Military Preparedness of the Cape

A clear grasp of the operational framework within which dominions had to be defended, existed in the British services. One of the examples all commanders knew well was that of Admiral John Byng. The British lost Minorca in 1756 due to a failure of British sea power and the ineptness of Byng. When Byng was outgunned by a French fleet, he deserted Minorca and left the British base to its fate. However, he was arrested, found guilty of neglect of duty and was executed by a firing squad on the quarterdeck of the *HMS Monarch* on 14 March 1757.¹⁴³ The incident prompted Voltaire's remark that the British now and then found it necessary to shoot an admiral, "pour encourager les autres". After the Minorca debacle the Admiralty stated that the Royal Navy could not be expected to watch all ports and ensure a complete blockade of the enemy; the "defence of every colony must depend on the military means confided to the care of the General Officer commanding" in the first instance. But the Admiralty realised too well that it could not possibly maintain in distant seas a naval force equal to what an enemy might despatch

¹³⁸ J.C. Mollema, *Geschiedenis van Nederland ter Zee*, III, p.373.

¹³⁹ A.J. Knock, *Uit Liefde voor Vaderland en Vrijheid*, p.148.

¹⁴⁰ NAN 2.01.29.03.28, J.J. Melvill, *Journaal gehouden ... Dordrecht...*, see 7/8/1796.

¹⁴¹ T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, p.176.

¹⁴² NAN 2.01.29.03.57, C. Benedictus (Secretaris), *Journaal der reise met s'Lands schip Dordrecht onder commando van Capitein Engelbertus Lucas*, 23/2/1796 – 9/12/1796, 7/8/1796.

there, the best, "indeed the only security arises from detention of the enemy's strength in their ports".¹⁴⁴ The Admiralty thus saw the blockade of an enemy's fleet in its base as the first line of defence. Hot pursuit at sea of such an enemy, if he would appear, was the second option and sufficient local defences (landward defences such as fortifications and military forces) capable of standing their own, or at least of holding out against an enemy until reinforcements arrive, the third. Judging from the British naval and military correspondence, this is the framework within which the British defence of the Cape was conducted.

Through their secret agents the British Admiralty received reports in December 1795 about the Batavian plans to despatch squadrons to the West and East Indies. They even had scant information about the secret negotiations with France. By early February 1796 they received an intelligence report from an agent in Bremen (dated 26 January) informing them that "... there are 11 ships of war in Texel with land forces on board ready for sea and that they are intended for a distant and secret operation in conjunction with a French squadron, the Cape of Good Hope was supposed to be the destination".¹⁴⁵ Britain decided to make every effort to defend the Cape and on 16 February 1796 the frigate *HMS Carysfort* (28) sailed to warn the Cape.¹⁴⁶

Carysfort arrived on 22 April. In a secret letter from the War Office (dated 14 February) Craig was warned that a considerable force was being fitted out in the Netherlands and France for "foreign service". They feared that part of this force, or the whole force might be bound for the Indies or destined to attack the Cape; considered "so essential in every point of view".¹⁴⁷ Craig was worried as he could not count on the loyal support of the whole population of the Cape and on the eastern frontier much discontent and very little support for British authority existed. In Cape Town, with the exception of a few traders, attitudes were not favourable and Craig feared if a Dutch or French fleet arrived, the population would support them. Specifically the remnant of the militia organisation that the VOC created was worrying. Craig realised the opportune arrival of reinforcements from Britain and of Elphinstone from India, were crucial variables. Six days after arriving at the Cape, *Carysfort* set sail for the East, to warn Elphinstone.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ R. Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare*, p.208.

¹⁴⁴ H.W. Richmond, *Statesmen and Sea Power*, pp.341-2.

¹⁴⁵ *Keith Papers*, I, Extract from a report by "Colonel Don" in Bremen, 26/1/1796, p.397.

¹⁴⁶ *Keith Papers*, I, Nepean – Elphinstone, 13/2/1796, p.396.

¹⁴⁷ NAUK WO1/325, War Office – Craig (Secret), 14/2/1796, p.31.

¹⁴⁸ T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, p.157.

Under the threat of a possible French-Dutch assault on the Cape, Craig decided to retain a number of the regiments at the Cape (the 33rd and 78th regiments) earmarked for India, for a while.¹⁴⁹ In addition, he also resolved to keep soldiers arriving at the Cape, but destined for India, until the threat had subsided.

Between May and August 1796 six warships and a large number of troopships arrived at the Cape. Though most of the troops were on their way to India, they could be retained at the Cape to assist with its defence for a while. These included the following: the 1500 troops onboard the *HMS Sceptre*, *HMS Crescent* and the six transport vessels that departed from Portsmouth on 6 March, the roughly 2400 men that followed with the *HMS Jupiter* and five transport vessels on 11 April, and about 2000 soldiers that were onboard the ships that sailed in convoy with *HMS Trident*. In addition, 600 men from St Helena Island were also at the Cape, and the reinforcements therefore amounted to about 5800 soldiers. By the time Lucas arrived, the Cape had around 8400 troops, while they were still expecting another 1000 men that were on their way to the East, which would make it 9400 in total.¹⁵⁰ The various military units present at the Cape included the 8th, 25th, 27th and 28th Dragoons, a Royal Artillery Corps, the 33rd, 78th, 80th, 84th, 86th, 91st, 95th and 98th Infantry Regiments, men from the Scotch Brigade and five companies of the 19th Regiment. Altogether 2000 of these men (the 33rd and 80th Regiments) were fine German mercenaries. (See Table 12 in Chapter 10 for a list of British Regiments that served at the Cape.) The Grenadiers of the various regiments were garrisoned at Muizenberg, while their light companies and the Khoi unit were stationed Wynberg.¹⁵¹ Although most of the troops were destined for the East, the fact that the Cape could be so substantially reinforced was indicative of the effective British military and naval organisation, as well as of the premium they placed on maintaining their control over the Cape.¹⁵²

Craig stated that the “accumulation of a considerable Force at this Place” which was not foreseen, provided them with a good opportunity for defence. He was “pretty certain that nothing exists in these Seas, capable of attempting the attack of it”. But Craig also knew that stopping an invader started at sea and he wrote to Dundas that the superiority of their navy in European waters, made “the sailing of large a fleet of Transports and Store Vessels, so extremely hazardous, that I cannot think it will be attempted during the summer months”.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ CA BO146, Craig – Governor-General and Supreme Council of Bengal, 29/8/1796, p.143.

¹⁵⁰ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Craig – Dundas, 30/7/1796, p.416.

¹⁵¹ W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa 1795-1895*, p.11.

¹⁵² See CA BO146, Letter Book, Craig – Dundas, 6/7/1796 and 29/7/1796, pp.125-6 and 138-9; as well as *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Craig – Dundas, 30/7/1796, pp.415-7.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

Despite this he still urged Dundas that the 4600 troops (from 84th, 86th, 95th, 98th Regiments, the Scotch Brigade and 29th Light Dragoons) intended for the defence of the Cape, must not be lessened.

With so many troops at the Cape and in the uncertainty before the Lucas expedition arrived at the Cape, the British feared the effect it might have if Lucas arrived at Mauritius and combined with the French forces there. Elphinstone and Craig considered capturing Mauritius. Elphinstone wrote to Governor Brooke on St Helena Island asking for reinforcements to undertake such an expedition. Craig also wrote to Dundas that without the Cape and the support it provided, the French were at a loss and they must consider attacking Mauritius, before the troops sail to India, as it would mean much to Britain. However, he assured Dundas they would always keep two important objectives in mind: not to expose the Cape and leave it without defence and not to inconvenience India.¹⁵⁴ Subsequent to the surrender of the Lucas squadron, Elphinstone notified Brooke that the Mauritius expedition was cancelled.¹⁵⁵

5.2. Elphinstone and the Royal Navy at the Cape

When the British took Simon's Town the public buildings (besides the batteries and guard houses) included a number of VOC storehouses, barracks, stables, a carpenter shop, a hospital (for up to 250 people) and the Resident's house.¹⁵⁶ Elphinstone was convinced of the importance of the Cape to the imperial interest of Britain and of its value as a naval station. He called it a "desirable colony" and stressed that it had specific value for provisioning passing ships.¹⁵⁷ To the First Lord of the Admiralty Board, Lord Spencer, he reported in July 1796 that as a naval station the Cape was valuable for ship repair and replenishment, while expeditions could rest and recuperate here: "God knows there are conveniences enough for as many more of us. The storehouses are very elegant and expensive to keep up". He stressed though that the "... safety of this place must depend on the fleet..."¹⁵⁸ This was exactly how the War Ministry saw it, as they emphasised to Craig the importance of an "... efficient Naval Force on that Station..."¹⁵⁹ In their role as defenders of the Cape, the British therefore saw the Royal Navy as the first line of defence, as a threat would come from the sea and what was more, if the

¹⁵⁴ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Craig – Dundas, 30/7/1796, p.415.

¹⁵⁵ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Brooke, 19/8/1796, p.450.

¹⁵⁶ NAUK WO1/324, A Description of the public buildings in Simon's Town, October 1795, pp.425-6.

¹⁵⁷ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Commissioners of Victualling, 23/9/1795, p.374.

¹⁵⁸ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Spencer, 10/7/1796, pp.431-2.

¹⁵⁹ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, War Office – Craig, 14/2/1796, pp.326-7.

navy was present at the Cape it could also perform other roles relevant to the maritime security of the empire.

After the capture of the Cape, Elphinstone received strategic guidelines about his responsibilities from Dundas. His “principle attention” in the “Indian Seas” was to preserve and secure the possessions they took from the enemy. Furthermore he had to “annoy the enemy’s settlements and trade” while providing protection to the trade and settlements of the EEIC.¹⁶⁰ In line with these guidelines, his “principle attention” now, was the defence of the Cape.

On 16 February 1796 the Admiralty despatched the frigate *Carysfort* to convey the important information about a possible Dutch attack on the Cape to Elphinstone. In the letters Elphinstone received from the Admiralty, he was warned that the Dutch squadron might be reinforced by an unspecified number of French ships. As a result he would receive three ships of the line as reinforcements.¹⁶¹ The Admiralty “advised” Elphinstone to allot a force of at least five to six ships of the line to protect the Cape, but added that “the extent of the force to be applied to the service of the Cape ... should not be given to you as a matter of positive instruction, but to leave you to exercise of your own judgement and discretion, not only in this instance, but in every other ... the person on the spot, only can be competent to determine”.¹⁶² If ever there was a clear indication of the trust the British system and the Royal Navy placed in the abilities of their senior commanders, this is it. The policy guideline (to defend the Cape against a possible attack) is given, while the commander “on the spot” is entrusted with the “when and how” of its execution.

When the Batavian warships moved from Texel on 23 February, a British sloop of war, *HMS Espiegle*, observed them and reported it to Admiral Duncan, Commander-in-Chief of the North Sea Fleet, the next day. An aspect which might seem trivial, but is of strategic importance in war as success is always linked to time, is that this important message was despatched from Deal on 24 February with a shutter semaphore across 15 stations to London – it reached London only five minutes later. Therefore, 32 hours after the Dutch squadron sailed, London had the intelligence.¹⁶³ The British immediately tried to intercept the Dutch squadron and for a month, despite the bad weather, Rear-Admiral Gardner searched in vain for the Dutch. For the British, the defence of the Cape of Good Hope therefore started with the Navy, if possible already in the north Atlantic.

¹⁶⁰ NAUK WO1/324, Dundas – Elphinstone, 16/1/1796, pp.488-9.

¹⁶¹ *Keith Papers*, I, Nepean – Elphinstone, 13/2/1796, p.396.

¹⁶² *The Keith Papers*, I, Nepean – Elphinstone, 14/2/1796, p.398.

¹⁶³ T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, p.155; and W.G. Perrin, *The Keith Papers* I, p.399.

The era of the French Revolution and Napoleon is unparalleled in the history of the British Royal Navy. The British understood what the running of a navy entailed, had a proficient naval administration, were skilled shipbuilders, had a large and competent body of sailors and excellent sea-going officers.¹⁶⁴ The navy improved its gunnery and training, signal system, tactics and equipment. As a consequence it never lost a major battle at sea and projected British power to the far corners of the world. It also had the capacity to protect British shipping, territories and interest against adversaries. Essentially it was the “wooden walls” that protected Britain against France and its continental enemies and made British success possible; as Mahan puts it: “... those far-distant storm-beaten ships upon which the Grand Army never looked”.¹⁶⁵

By comparison the Dutch and French Navies were in a poor state. The glorious days of the French Royal Navy of De Grasse and De Suffren were no longer – proficiency in handling ships and gunnery declined, while little professionalism existed amongst the officers. Most of its aristocratic officers were removed, effectively destroying the officers-class and ruining the organisation. Just in terms of ships of the line in 1793, the Royal Navy had 113 (85 commissioned and a total of 304 warships), France had 76 ships of the line (27 commissioned and a total of 246 warships), while the Netherlands had 49 and Spain 76. Add the fact that Dutch and French ships were considered to be better in quality than the British, it meant that on paper the combined naval strength of France and her allies were superior. Yet, they did not utilise this valuable resource in the same judicious and strategic manner as the British.

Professionally the relationship between Elphinstone and Craig was good, while in the absence of Elphinstone, the relationship between Blankett and Craig was not at all amiable. The navy used the facilities in Simon’s Bay, but after Elphinstone departed, Blankett complained to Craig about a shortage of storage and housing space and requested to use the Resident’s house. Craig was in no mood to grant Blankett favours and despondently answered that there was a general shortage of buildings for all British military departments.¹⁶⁶ More squabbles followed. Elphinstone referred to the disagreement between these two gentlemen in a letter to Spencer, but stated that he was “determined not to dispute”.¹⁶⁷ Dundas even commented on it when he wrote to Spencer that “land and naval commanders are not on the most cordial terms”.¹⁶⁸ However, this did not impact on their ability to perform their military responsibilities.

¹⁶⁴ S.W. Roskill, *The Strategy of Sea Power. Its development and application*, p.65.

¹⁶⁵ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire*, I, p.118.

¹⁶⁶ NAUK WO1/324, Blankett – Craig and Craig – Blankett, 16/12/1795, pp.889-94.

¹⁶⁷ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Spencer, 10/7/1796, p.432.

¹⁶⁸ *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, I, Dundas – Spencer, 24/3/1796, pp.239-40.

By March 1796 the British Government was very concerned about the security of the Cape and their possessions in the East from “a force superior considerably to ours ... before we can be in a condition to follow with equal force”. In a private letter to Spencer, Dundas instructed the Navy that “...nothing had to be left in a state of uncertainty in the East Indies; and if you send a speedy reinforcement to ensure superiority at the Cape, I hope it will be under the command of a goodtempered as well as an able admiral”.¹⁶⁹ No doubt he also had the Blankett-Craig relationship in mind.

Elphinstone had already departed from Madras on 23 March with his flagship *HMS Monarch* (74) and the frigate *HMS Sphynx* (24) and arrived at the Cape on 23 May. He was now fully informed about the possibility of a French-Batavian attack on the Cape, yet the situation looked bleak as his force at the Cape consisted of only three ships of the line, which were inferior to an anticipated combined fleet. Elphinstone knew that he could not count on support of Rear-Admiral Peter Rainer of the East India squadron, as Rainer had only four ships of the line which he needed for the defence of India and Ceylon and for convoy duties. As some of Elphinstone's ships were on patrol and escort duties all over the Indian Ocean, the only thing he could hope for was that his ships and the reinforcements from Britain would arrive at the Cape in time.¹⁷⁰

In the meantime a French squadron under the command of Rear-Admiral Pierre C.C.G. de Sercey, destined for Mauritius, sailed from France during March 1796. It consisted of six ships (four large frigates and two corvettes) and took 800 troops to Mauritius.¹⁷¹ The two corvettes were captured by the British early in March, but the frigates got away. Spencer was concerned that De Sercey's objective was to attack the Cape or even other British possessions in the East and he thought they might join forces with the Dutch fleet that sailed from Texel.¹⁷²

As Elphinstone was making his way back to the Cape, De Sercey's frigates were rounding the Cape en route to Mauritius. On 25 May, to the south-east of False Bay, De Sercey's squadron crossed paths with the *HMS Sphynx* (Captain George Brisac) and an American ship (*Eliza*) that the British captured at Mauritius earlier. Immediately one of the frigates, *La Vertu* (40), made for the *Eliza*, while another frigate, the *Régénérée* (36), tried to engage the *Sphynx*. Brisac was outgunned – he gave up the *Eliza* and knew that he had to make a run for it, not fight. In a hot pursuit that lasted two days Brisac used all available canvas and threw most of his guns overboard to gain weight and speed, but he made it into False Bay

¹⁶⁹

Ibid.

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A. Allardyce, *Memoir of the honourable George Keith Elphinstone*, pp.117-8.

¹⁷¹

C.J. de Villiers, *Die Britse Vloot aan die Kaap*, pp.64-5.

and arrived at Simon's Town on 27 May.¹⁷³ De Sercey arrived at Mauritius in June 1796 and his ships joined the frigates and corvettes stationed at Mauritius. He served as the Commander of the French squadron in the East to 1799.

In the light of the French-Batavian threat British naval reinforcements to the Cape was impressive: *HMS Sceptre* (64) and *HMS Crescent* (36) with transport vessels and troops departed from Portsmouth on 6 March, *HMS Jupiter* (50) with transport vessels and troops departed on 11 April, while Rear-Admiral Pringle with the *HMS Tremendous* (74), *HMS Trident* (64) and transports sailed from Spithead at the beginning of May. If these reinforcements and Elphinstone's ships from India and Mauritius were to arrive at the Cape in time, there would be no way in which the Batavian squadron would be able to take the Cape.¹⁷⁴

Luck was on Elphinstone's side. On 24 May *HMS Stately* (64) and two frigates arrived from their blockade off Mauritius, while four days later the *Sceptre* and *Crescent* arrived. The arrival of the ships of the line (*Sceptre* and *Stately*) was a relief to Elphinstone and he wrote to Spencer on 10 July: "The arrival of the *Sceptre* and the convoy puts this Colony in my opinion, both in a naval and military view, beyond insult by any force our enemies can send out".¹⁷⁵

Though De Sercey's frigates rounded the Cape and captured two ships on the route, Elphinstone had no certainty about its strength or De Sercey's objective and also had no knowledge about the whereabouts of Lucas. He feared that it was just the van of a greater force and considered sending part of his force to Mauritius, where he thought the enemy might be. However, on 21 July a frigate, the *HMS Moselle* (18), arrived in Table Bay and gave Elphinstone valuable intelligence. On 12 April (the day before Lucas anchored at La Luz), a frigate approached them from astern and though some of his officers considered it to be British, Lucas thought it was French and did not give chase. It was the *Moselle*, under the command of Captain Brisbane, escorting two ships to the West Indies. Lucas must be given credit for assuming that it was a French ship, as the British captured the *Moselle* from the French in 1795.¹⁷⁶ Brisbane shadowed the Dutch for a while and concluded that they were on their way to the Cape. He then decided to let his convoy proceed alone, as it was more important to make haste for the Cape to warn the British commander.¹⁷⁷ On arriving at the Cape, the *Moselle* had less than a week's provisions onboard, but Brisbane was able to inform Elphinstone about the

¹⁷² *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, II, Spencer – Man (Rear-Admiral), 25/03/1796, pp.16-7.

¹⁷³ CA A455, Henry Dundas Collection, Elphinstone – Dundas, 6/7/1796; and *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Admiralty, 24/6/1795, pp.420-1.

¹⁷⁴ T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, p.156.

¹⁷⁵ *The Keith Papers* I, Elphinstone – Spencer, 10/7/1796, p.431.

¹⁷⁶ T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, p.154.

size of Lucas' squadron (four ships of the line and four other ships) and provided him with conclusive proof that the squadron had not yet rounded the Cape. Elphinstone immediately decided to concentrate his force at the Cape until the destination of the Batavian squadron was certain. Furthermore, the fact that Lucas had the opportunity to give chase to the *Moselle* and capture her, but did not, told Elphinstone much about the state of affairs in the squadron.¹⁷⁸ Elphinstone had kind words for Brisbane and he emphasised his commitment to duty, "zeal, perseverance and good intention ..." in a letter to the Admiralty.¹⁷⁹ A few days after the *Moselle*, the *Tremendous* and *Jupiter* arrived and in August, the *Trident* arrived. This bolstered Elphinstone's force substantially.

In an exercise that bears testimony to organisation and efficiency of British sea power, they managed to reinforce the Cape with six warships, troopships, supply vessels and a large body of troops. These were dispatched from Britain and arrived at the Cape within a few months (between 28 May and 2 August). It was a distance of about 7000 miles!

6. THE FIASCO AT SALDANHA BAY, AUGUST 1796

6.1. The Dutch Stay in Saldanha Bay and British Military Preparations

After arriving in Saldanha Bay, Lucas despatched a number of officers ashore to gain intelligence. Captain Zoeteman went to the house of the Post Holder, while De Cerff went to Hoedjies Bay and Valkenburg to the eastern and south-eastern extremity of the bay.¹⁸⁰ They returned with little news: when Zoeteman and crewmembers of the *Braave* arrived at the former VOC post the Post Holder, Jacob Stofberg, and a British contingent of 20 dragoons had fled. Stofberg apparently feared that he would be arrested as he was in British service.¹⁸¹ De Cerff found a letter in an empty boat telling them nothing important, except that a large number of British troops had arrived in False Bay. De Cerff returned to the *Dordrecht* with a slave of one De Munnik, but he also gave them little news.¹⁸²

During his reconnaissance Valkenburg visited a farm called *Stompe Hoek* and talked to Paul Suurdeeg, a *knecht* of one Miss Gildenhuis, who informed him that the British had between

¹⁷⁷ J.C. De Jonge, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche zeewezen*, V, pp.236 and 241.

¹⁷⁸ T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, p.158.

¹⁷⁹ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Admiralty, 3/8/1796, p.437.

¹⁸⁰ T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, p.177.

¹⁸¹ A.J. Knock, *Uit Liefde voor Vaderland en Vrijheid*, p.149.

¹⁸² T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, p.177.

6000 and 7000 troops (including at least 300 cavalymen) at the Cape.¹⁸³ According to Knock, who was part of this reconnaissance, Suurdeeg told them there were only 4000 men at the Cape, but many were ill-disciplined and inexperienced.¹⁸⁴ Whatever they were told, by comparison it was still a much greater force than Lucas had available.

Lucas had very little certain information about the British naval presence at the Cape. He knew that Elphinstone left for India and calculated if he had not yet returned and Blankett had not gone to India, there must be around three ships of the line at the Cape.¹⁸⁵ No overwhelming threat. So, if the Royal Navy was not superior, their position was quite secure and they had little to worry about. If a British land force posed a problem, they could always leave the bay. Lucas ordered his ships to move deeper into the bay and they anchored immediately to the north of Schaapen Island in a secure formation, as the five heavier Dutch warships (*Revolutie*, *Castor*, *Dordrecht*, *Tromp* and *Brave*) anchored in a line ahead formation from east to west, while the lighter vessels anchored behind.¹⁸⁶

In the meantime they tried to gain more intelligence concerning the British. Lucas wrote letters to a few burghers at the Cape (namely Breda, Faure and Smuts) stating that his force was at anchor in Saldanha Bay with nine ships and that he came "... met oogmerk om met behulp van der Kaapsche weldenkende Burghers U van het slaafsche juk der Britsche geweldenaars te verlossen".¹⁸⁷ The two other officers that had served at the Cape, Henry and Claris, also wrote letters to a number of burghers, which De Cerff took ashore on 7 August.¹⁸⁸

On 8 August the Dutch established a post at the watering hole with one 4-pounder field gun, under the command of Knock and fourteen artillerists.¹⁸⁹ As Knock was convinced that most of the population did not support the British and preferred to be under the Dutch flag, he recorded the long motivational speech, full of revolutionary rhetoric, he gave his small contingent in his journal. He told his men that the inhabitants of the Cape were their fellow countrymen who landed in the hands of the "snoode roofzugtige Engelsen" because of the treachery of the Stadtholder (to whom a series of adjectives were also attached). Now it was their duty to free the Cape from slavery ("uit slavernij te verlossen"). This was not the end of it! Like a commander on the eve of a decisive battle, he continued that they had to prepare themselves

¹⁸³ T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, p.178.

¹⁸⁴ A.J. Knock, *Uit Liefde voor Vaderland en Vrijheid*, p.149.

¹⁸⁵ T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, p.178.

¹⁸⁶ NAN 2.01.29.03.44, Plan der Saldanha Baij en situasie van't Hollandse Escader, 16/8/1796 in E. Lucas, *Journaal gehouden aan boord van s'Lands schip Dordrecht...*, 25/1/1796 to 18/8/1796.

¹⁸⁷ T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, p.179.

¹⁸⁸ A.J. Knock, *Uit Liefde voor Vaderland en Vrijheid*, p.150.

¹⁸⁹ NAN 2.01.29.03.57, C. Benedictus, *Journaal der reise met s'Lands schip Dordrecht...*, 8/8/1796.

to lay down their lives for the just cause of the revolution and the freedom of their fellow countrymen. They had to fight bravely and though their enemy might be numerically superior, they had nothing to fear; “kloekmoedig, standvastig en onverschrokken, en vreezen wij niet voor eene klijne overmagt van lafhartige slaaven van het despotismus”.¹⁹⁰ Their fatherland would be grateful for their sacrifices and honour them. The next day the brig *Havik* anchored in front of the post house to provide gunfire support to Knock and his men ashore.

On 9 August a servant of Sebastian van Reenen arrived to warn Lucas that when they arrived in Saldanha Bay on 6 August, 700 soldiers (including 200 men from the Khoi corps) and 150 cavalry departed from the Cape to Saldanha Bay. At the same time eleven British ships sailed from False Bay, but it was uncertain if they were warships or not.¹⁹¹ Lucas was warned that the Cape was well defended and that the area around Cape Town was invested with guns. He, however, argued that due to the distance between Saldanha Bay and Simon's Town, the British ships could not have received news of their presence on the same day they arrived, and he therefore concluded that Van Reenen's servant was a spy.¹⁹²

The Dutch considered creating two batteries at the entrance of the bay with at least three 24-pounders each. This was not done because they immediately began to land their sick and those suffering from scurvy, but as desertion posed a big problem, they were landed on Meeuwen and Schaapen Islands (two barren islands in the bay). They were much in need of fresh provisions for the recuperation of the sick and various parties went ashore to fetch water and seek fresh meat or other produce. The British, however, was one ahead of them and the Dutch could see men driving oxen and livestock into the interior as fast as they could.¹⁹³

On 10 August Captain-Lieutenant Valkenburg went ashore and reported to Lucas that some of Knock's men had seen a British cavalry patrol in the distance.¹⁹⁴ Knock had doubled his guard and asked to do an armed reconnaissance, but his request was denied. The next day Knock had to return to the ship with the fieldpiece and the soldiers, while an officer of the *Havik* and four seamen maintained control over the watering point.¹⁹⁵ To provide fire support to the watering place, the frigate *Bellona* moved deeper into the Bay, around the treacherous Schaapen Island, and anchored opposite Stompe Hoek on 11 August.

¹⁹⁰ A.J. Knock, *Uit Liefde voor Vaderland en Vrijheid*, pp.149-52.

¹⁹¹ NAN 2.01.29.03.57, C. Benedictus, *Journal der reise met s'Lands schip Dordrecht...*, 8/8/1796.

¹⁹² T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, p.182.

¹⁹³ A.J. Knock, *Uit Liefde voor Vaderland en Vrijheid*, pp.152-3.

¹⁹⁴ NAN 2.01.29.03.57, C. Benedictus, *Journal der reise met s'Lands schip Dordrecht...*, 10/8/1796.

¹⁹⁵ A.J. Knock, *Uit Liefde voor Vaderland en Vrijheid*, pp.153-4.

Clariss went to the Hoedjes Bay on 10 August to see if there were any letters, but there was nothing and it was now obvious how difficult contact with the local population would be. He returned with a local farmer, De Munnik on 11 August, who told Lucas that the British had about 6000 men at the Cape, though uncertain about the navy, he was quite correct in reporting that Elphinstone had returned with his flagship and a frigate (the *Monarch* and the *Sphynx*) about two months earlier.¹⁹⁶ However, as De Munnik stated that the British ships were in a poor state (“zeer ontramponeerd”), Lucas concluded that Elphinstone was indeed at the Cape with four ships of the line (one damaged).¹⁹⁷ As it was not an overwhelming force, he decided to wait for the French.

Lieutenant Valkenburg went ashore on the evening of 11 August to visit his father-in-law, about three hours distant from Saldanha Bay, to gain intelligence and find out if the local burghers would support the Lucas expedition. On 12 August four men from the *Braave* deserted and Knock with 16 armed men went to search for them. They arrived at a nearby farm at about 21:30, but found nobody, the furniture was removed and the stables were empty. They returned without the deserters.¹⁹⁸ Late that evening Valkenburg returned. He reported that he saw an enemy force of about 600 men with four field guns approaching, while the main force (estimated at about 1400 men) apparently followed.¹⁹⁹ He gained no intelligence about the Royal Navy, but it was obvious that Saldanha Bay was not secure and that the British had hampered all their efforts to make contact with the civilians.²⁰⁰

Lucas summoned his commanders to the *Dordrecht* for a Council of War meeting (*Krijgsraad*) on 13 August, to decide how to act in the best interest of the “vaderland” and what their course of action should be.²⁰¹ Lucas explained to them that they had to act in accordance with Articles 10 to 12 of his orders. It was obvious to many of the commanders that the French would not arrive and they knew that without substantial local support, it was impossible to recapture the Cape with their small force. In addition, they failed to acquire provisions, while their water supply was insufficient for a long voyage. Some commanders considered it very dangerous to stay in Saldanha Bay any longer and urged Lucas to immediately sail for Mauritius, stating that their limited water stock could be supplemented by wine. Lengthy

¹⁹⁶ NAN 2.01.29.03.44. E. Lucas, Journaal gehouden aan boord van s'Lands schip *Dortrecht*..., 25/1/1796 – 18/8/1796.

¹⁹⁷ T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, p.185.

¹⁹⁸ A.J. Knock, *Uit Lieve voor Vaderland en Vrijheid*, pp.154-5.

¹⁹⁹ J.C. Mollema, *Geschiedenis van Nederland ter Zee*, III, p.374.

²⁰⁰ NAN 2.01.29.03.44. E. Lucas, Journaal gehouden aan boord van s'Lands schip *Dortrecht*...; and T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, pp.186-7.

²⁰¹ A.J. Knock, *Uit Lieve voor Vaderland en Vrijheid*, p.155.

deliberations took place and the *Krijgsraad* eventually decided, on a proposal from Lucas, that they would only sail once they had shipped enough water for six weeks.²⁰²

On 14 August Lieutenant Muller (a naval officer) and an armed guard of 15 men were ordered to patrol the bay with a boat to observe the British patrols. Along the southern end of the bay, a patrol of about 10 cavalymen fired at the boat. Though Muller was ordered not to go ashore, he landed and ordered his men to force the cavalymen from the beach. A fire fight broke out and Muller was forced to withdraw without seven of his men. It was unsure if the men were casualties, were taken prisoner or deserted. Muller was nonetheless arrested and court-martialled the following day, but was found not guilty of misconduct.²⁰³

On 15 August Lieutenant-Colonel Henry (the Adjutant General) and a number of the senior officers in the squadron urged Lucas to depart as their efforts to communicate with the local population and organise a rebellion had failed. Lucas maintained that he first wished to finish the watering process.²⁰⁴ Henry asked permission to land 600 men to conduct an armed reconnaissance, but Lucas refused, stating they had too many sick onboard and the fleet was too poorly manned. Instead Captain Claris was ordered to take 50 men and search for the missing men. Before he could leave they received news that about 150 British soldiers were close to the watering hole. Henry then asked Lucas to permit him to go ashore with 300 men, but as more men deserted in the meantime and he feared more desertions, Lucas did not allow it. Another fourteen desertions were reported the next day. Generally Dutch naval historians have ascribed the disciplinary problems on board the ships to the poor leadership qualities of many officers. Knock however, in the revolutionary spirit of the day, ascribed the desertions to the despotic discipline on some of the ships, stating that once they were ashore, sailors refused to return to “slavery”. Also the men wanted to get ashore to fight the enemy and show their mettle, but as it was denied, they deserted.²⁰⁵ If officers viewed the situation like this – little wonder that so much disorder ensued!

In contrast with the Dutch situation, Elphinstone and Craig again showed their command of the situation. They had a good working relationship, organisational ability, were committed, acted with vigour, and were relentless in their pursuance of duty. Late on the evening of 3 August (before Lucas sailed into the bay), Craig received the first news that ships were seen off

²⁰² J.C. Mollema, *Geschiedenis van Nederland ter Zee*, III, p.375; and T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, pp.187-91.

²⁰³ A.J. Knock, *Uit Liefde voor Vaderland en Vrijheid*, pp.155-6.

²⁰⁴ NAN 2.01.29.03.29, P. Freteris, *Journal gehouden aanboord van s'Lands schip Dordrecht gecommandeert werdende door den Capt'n Engelbertus Lucas door den ondergeteekende Lijutenant ter zee, 26/10/1795 – 18/8/1796, 15/8/1796.*

the coast in the vicinity of Saldanha Bay. He immediately dispatched Lt McNab with cavalry to Saldanha Bay to investigate and also informed Elphinstone. It was a stormy season and as the ships' documents of August 1796 indicated, they had constant strong gales and often had to do repairs due to storm damage.²⁰⁶ When Elphinstone received the news he immediately prepared his ships for sea,²⁰⁷ but due to urgent repairs to the *Monarch* (her main mast had to be replaced) and a strong southeaster, his squadron only departed on 6 August.

The two commanders thought that the Dutch ships might sail south and round the Cape at a distance in order to miss the strong British squadron. As they sailed out a boat from the shore reported that sails were seen to the south of False Bay. Elphinstone therefore searched "... to the Southward and West, in expectation of their having taken that course". Sea conditions were bad, but they continued the search despite storm damage to many of the ships (the *Ruby* at one stage had two meters of water in her hold). Elphinstone remarked with disgust that it was "the most tempestuous weather I have ever experienced".²⁰⁸

On the day Elphinstone sailed, Craig was told that nine Dutch ships had anchored in Saldanha Bay. He immediately sealed off all routes to the Cape and as he feared that they might land and move into the interior, he issued a series of proclamations that prohibited any contact with the Dutch. The population was warned; if they contravene this order it could carry the death penalty. Furthermore, everybody within 10 hours of Saldanha Bay was ordered to take their cattle and horses to the interior, the British commandeered all horses around Cape Town, and they also prohibited the departure of all fishing vessels.²⁰⁹ The fact that no assistance came from the burghers could be ascribed to the effective measures Craig took; some even before the arrival of Lucas. Already on 21 June he informed the Burgher Senate that the Dutch force of eight ships on its way to the Cape, was too small to take on the British forces and he emphasised that burghers assisting the Dutch would be severely punished.²¹⁰ No burghers were prepared to make contact with the Dutch. Craig suspected that Van Reenen communicated with the Dutch fleet in Saldanha Bay and provided them with intelligence about the British. Van Reenen was afterwards arrested and brought to the Cape as Craig was sure of his guilt: "Bastian van Rheenen's criminality is undoubted". However, due to his poor health, big

²⁰⁵ A.J. Knock, *Uit Liefde voor Vaderland en Vrijheid*, pp.155-7.

²⁰⁶ NAUK ADM/51/1261, A Journal of Proceedings of His Majesty's Ship *Jupiter*, for the period 19/1/1796 to 31/1/1797, see July and August 1796.

²⁰⁷ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Admiralty, 19/8/1796, pp.454.

²⁰⁸ NAUK WO1/325, Elphinstone – Nepean, 19/8/1796, pp.561-2.

²⁰⁹ See the various Proclamations by Craig in CA BO171, 7/08/1796, pp.110-1; BO147, 11/08/1796, p.228; and BO160, Day Book, 9/08/1796, p.49.

²¹⁰ CA BO147, Letters Book, Craig – Burgher Senate and Landdrosts, 21/6/1796, pp.187-8.

family, an appeal from the Burgher Senate on his behalf and the fact that nothing could be proved, Craig released him.²¹¹

Conversely the burghers were also not too keen to support the British against the Dutch threat. On 7 August Craig ordered the Burgher Senate and the Landdrost of Stellenbosch, R.J. van der Riet, to buy horses and requisition wagons from the burghers for his march to Saldanha Bay. When he was told that it would be difficult to get the wagons at such short notice, he replied that the members of the Burgher Senate would be responsible for getting the wagons and he would billet twelve soldiers with each of them if they did not execute his orders.²¹² Lists were immediately compiled of who was prepared to supply wagons and who not and just to prove the point Craig billeted a sergeant and ten soldiers at one of the burghers that refused to supply a wagon.²¹³ This illustrated to the burghers that the British viewed the defence of the Cape as an extremely serious matter and if they could not rely on their support in defending the Cape against a foreign threat, they would surely not allow any interference in the process. The British were willing and able to do what was necessary to maintain the Cape.

Craig also realised that he immediately had to warn Elphinstone. It was considered so urgent to get the message to Elphinstone that four of the troopships in False Bay and a cutter was dispatched on 7 August to search for Elphinstone – needless to say without success. The only ships Elphinstone met at sea were the *Statety*, *Rattlesnake* and *Echo*, returning from a patrol around Mauritius.²¹⁴ The squadron arrived back in Simon's Bay on 12 August with damage to most of the ships. When Elphinstone learned that the Dutch were actually at anchor in Saldanha Bay, he wanted to leave immediately to prevent them from escaping. But urgent repair work on some of the ships was necessary and due to a south-easterly gale, it was impossible to sail. He wrote to Craig on 12 August, "it blows so strong we cannot immediately get out as is my intention".²¹⁵ The next day was even worse, "a perfect tempest", as Elphinstone stated. Numerous ships dragged their anchors, the *Sceptre* collided with a troopship, the *Crescent* beached, the *Trident* hit a rock and the *Tremendous* "parted two cables, drove, and was in great danger of being lost". The next day *Crescent* was pulled off and re-floated, while urgent repairs feverishly continued to prepare the ships for sea. Elphinstone complained that

²¹¹ F. Duminy and J.M. Duminy, *Duminy Dagboeke*, p.212; and H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind*, p.59.

²¹² *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Craig – Dundas, 19/8/1796, pp.434-5.

²¹³ H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind*, p.59.

²¹⁴ CA BO147, Letter Book, Ross – Van der Riet, 13/8/1795, pp.231-2; and *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Admiralty, 19/8/1796, p.454.

²¹⁵ CA BO30, Elphinstone – Craig, 12/8/1796, p.229; and *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Craig – Dundas, 19/8/1796, pp.433-7.

“notwithstanding every exertion and the most anxious moments of my life, we could not get out until the 15th”.²¹⁶

With Elphinstone back in Simon’s Bay and preparing to sail to Saldanha Bay, Craig decided to march to Saldanha Bay with his troops on Sunday 14 August. Together with the advance force and cavalry the British force, under the command of Craig and Brigadier McKenzie, consisted of 2500 troops, two howitzers and nine field guns. The troops included the Grenadiers of the light battalions and of the 78th Regiment, two squadrons from the 25th and 26th Light Dragoons, the battalion companies of the 78th and 80th Regiments, and the Khoi troops.²¹⁷ Craig left 4000 troops for the defence of the Cape under the command of Major-General Doyle and Brigadier Campbell,²¹⁸ while the roughly 2000 troops that had arrived in August, were still in False Bay.

When the wind allowed it on 15 August Elphinstone immediately put to sea with 14 ships. Though a number of sources stated he had thirteen ships (seven ships of the line), Elphinstone listed fourteen ships in his report to the Admiralty.²¹⁹ In his journal Admiral Pringle also complained about the “strong gale” and recorded that the *Tremendous* “made sail out of the bay” in the company of *Monarch*, *America*, *Ruby*, *Stately*, *Sceptre*, *Trident*, *Jupiter*, *Crescent*, *Sphynx*, *Moselle*, *Rattlesnake*, *Echo* and *Hope* – fourteen ships.²²⁰ The *Jupiter*’s logbook entry of 15 August simply stated: “Admiral and squadron in company. On way to Saldanha Bay to the enemy”.²²¹ They indeed hurried “to the enemy” and by midday the next day, to Craig’s delight, he saw Elphinstone’s ships at sea “with all sails crowded advancing with a fair wind directly to the mouth of the harbour”.²²²

6.2. The British-Dutch stand-off at Saldanha Bay

On the morning of 16 August, the Dutch could see the columns of British soldiers with their red uniforms marching on. At about 12:30 the British van opened fire on the *Bellona* (she was close

²¹⁶ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Admiralty, 19/8/1796, pp.454-5.

²¹⁷ W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa 1795-1895*, p.12.

²¹⁸ CA BO160, Day Book, 12/8/1796, p.51; and *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Craig –Dundas, 19/8/1796, pp.433-5.

²¹⁹ NAUK WO1/325, Elphinstone – Nepean, 19/8/1796, p.565.

²²⁰ NAUK ADM50/65, Proceedings of the Squadron under the Command of Thomas Pringle Esq, Rear Admiral of the Red, for the period 24/8/1795 to 19/5/1798, see 13 and 14/8/1796.

²²¹ NAUK ADM/51/1261, A Journal of Proceedings ... *Jupiter*, see 15/8/1796.

²²² *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Craig – Dundas, 19/8/1796, p.435.

inshore) with field pieces and managed to hit her a few times. She immediately returned fire.²²³ Some Khoi troops were deployed on the heights above the bay and as the guns of the *Bellona* fired with regular intervals, Renshaw, a British artilleryman, reported that one of the shots struck the musket of one of the soldiers, causing it to recoil on the others. A few men were thrown down by the "... violence of the shock and concussion of the air. The remaining part of the regiment seeing the sad disaster that had befallen their companion (not one being hurt) and dreading a similar catastrophe most courageously took to their heels and fled with the greatest precipitation".²²⁴

At around 10:00 the first reports that sails were seen at sea reached Lucas.²²⁵ At about 14:00 the *Havik* signalled that the lookout on the hill above the peninsula could definitely make out eleven approaching ships. Lucas ordered his ships to clear for action, but many of the crewmembers onboard the *Dordrecht* became mutinous, swore at their officers and NCO's and threatened to shoot them when the fighting commenced: "wanneer zij begonnen te vegten, dezelve als dan voor de kop te zullen schieten. En dat zij eenige van de officieren wel zouden vinden wanneer het er eens op aan kwam".²²⁶

Elphinstone sent the frigate *Crescent* ahead to reconnoitre. When she appeared in the entrance of Saldanha Bay at 16:00 the Dutch were not sure who it was, some thought it was French, other British, "...den eenen dacht Franschen, den ander dat het Engelschen waren".²²⁷ As they were still hoping that their French allies might arrive after all, Lucas even hoisted the signal flag agreed upon with the French. The frigate did not reply and as she closed in, she was fired upon, causing her to veer off.²²⁸ About an hour later, no doubt to the shock and anguish of the Dutch onlookers, eight British ships of the line entered the bay in a line ahead formation. They anchored in a line of battle to the north of the Dutch ships, out of reach of the Dutch guns, and blocked the entrance of the bay.²²⁹

²²³ See NAN 2.01.29.03.29, P. Freteris, Journaal gehouden aanboord van s'Lands schip *Dordrecht*...; 2.01.29.03.28, J.J. Melvill, Journaal gehouden ... *Dordrecht*..., 16/8/1796; and A.J. Knock, *Uit Liefde voor Vaderland en Vrijheid*, p.157.

²²⁴ R. Renshaw, *Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope, the Indian Ocean and up the Red Sea, with Travels into Egypt, through the Desert, etc*, pp.44-5.

²²⁵ NAN 2.01.29.03.29, P. Freteris, Journaal gehouden aanboord van s'Lands schip *Dordrecht*...; and 2.01.29.03.57, C. Benedictus, Journaal der reise met s'Lands schip *Dordrecht* ..., 16/8/1796.

²²⁶ A.J. Knock, *Uit Liefde voor Vaderland en Vrijheid*, pp.157 and 162.

²²⁷ IMH Milo120, Diverse scheepsjournalen van : *Braave, Bellona, Castor, Revolutie, Tromp, Eensgezindheid en Amazoone*, 1796, Capte Rijnbende, *Revolutie*, 16/8/1796.

²²⁸ T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche* ..., p.194.

²²⁹ NAUK ADM50/65, Proceedings of the Squadron ... of Thomas Pringle..., 16-17/8/1796; and NAN 2.01.29.03.57, C. Benedictus, Journaal der reise met s'Lands schip *Dordrecht* ..., 16/8/1796.

Melvill reported that thirteen British ships entered the bay,²³⁰ while Lucas afterwards reported eight ships of the line, five frigates and two corvettes – fifteen ships, clearly an exaggeration!²³¹ Craig also counted thirteen ships at sea, but as both British admirals stated fourteen ships left Simon's Bay and were present, it is best to assume that one of the slower ships arrived later, specifically since Lucas told his officers late that night that the British had 14 ships. The stand-off was now on and the opposing squadrons compared as follows:²³²

Table 10: The Dutch and British squadrons at Saldanha Bay, 17 August 1796					
Navy of the Batavian Republic			British Royal Navy		
Ship	Commander	Guns	Ship	Commander	Guns
<i>Dordrecht</i>	R-Adm E. Lucas Capt J.J. Melvill	64	<i>Monarch</i>	V-Adm G.K. Elphinstone Capt J. Elphinstone	74
<i>Revolutie</i>	Capt J. Rijnbenden	64	<i>Tremendous</i>	R-Adm T. Pringle Capt J. Aylmer	74
<i>Admiraal Tromp</i>	Capt-Lt J. Valkenburg	54	<i>America</i>	Capt J. Blankett	64
<i>Castor</i>	Capt J. Claris	44	<i>Stately</i>	Capt W. Douglas	64
<i>Braave</i>	Capt-Lt J. Zoetemen	40	<i>Ruby</i>	Capt J. Waller	64
<i>Bellona</i>	Capt-Lt G.A. Falk	24	<i>Sceptre</i>	Capt W. Essington	64
<i>Cyrene</i>	Capt-Lt C. de Cerff	24	<i>Trident</i>	Capt E.O. Osborne	64
<i>Havik</i>	Lt P. Besemer	18	<i>Jupiter</i>	Capt G. Losack	50
<i>Vrouw Maria</i>	Lt H. Barbier	20	<i>Crescent</i>	Capt E. Buller	36
			<i>Sphynx</i>	Cdr A. Todd	24
			<i>Mosselle</i>	Capt J. Brisbane	18
			<i>Rattlesnake</i>	Cdr E. Ramage	16
			<i>Echo</i>	Lt J. Turner	18
			<i>Hope (brig)</i>	Lt T. Alexander	-

Elphinstone did not mince with words. By 19:30 he despatched Lieutenant Coffin of the *Monarch* under the flag of truce with a letter to Lucas.²³³ The letter simply stated that the strength of his force was obvious, therefore “to spare an effusion of blood” he requested the Dutch to surrender “otherwise it will be my duty ... of making serious attack ... the issue of which is not difficult for you to guess”.²³⁴

Lieutenant Coffin arrived back with an oral request for a ceasefire from Lucas. Elphinstone was not satisfied and dispatched Coffin again with a letter stating they had a

²³⁰ NAN 2.01.29.03.28, J.J. Melvill, Journaal gehouden ... *Dordrecht*..., see 16/8/1796.

²³¹ NAN 2.01.29.03.57, C. Benedictus, Journaal der reise met s'Lands schip *Dordrecht* ..., 16/8/1796.

²³² NAN 2.01.29.03.44, E. Lucas, Journaal gehouden aan boord van s'Lands schip *Dordrecht*...; and *The Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Admiralty, 19/8/1796, pp.452-3. Elphinstone indicated some Dutch ships had two or four more guns and he probably added the carronades onboard, while the Dutch did not.

²³³ NAN 2.01.29.03.57, C. Benedictus, Journaal der reise met s'Lands schip *Dordrecht* ..., 16/8/1796.

²³⁴ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Lucas, 16/8/1796, pp.440-1.

ceasefire until dawn the next day, only if Lucas gave his word that they would not damage or destroy their ships. Lucas then wrote a letter and gave his word of honour.²³⁵ Elphinstone knew the Dutch fleet was bottled up in Saldanha Bay and ordered Pringle and Blankett to down the topgallant yards of their ships.²³⁶ Through the night the British maintained their guard over the Dutch ships to prevent them from escaping or destroying their own ships.²³⁷

British troops in the meantime deployed around the bay and by nightfall the Dutch saw a large number of fires ashore as the British troops encamped. Lucas afterwards reported that there were an estimated 5000 British troops (another exaggeration) along the shores of the bay.²³⁸ A map in his journal indicated that on the eastern shore British troops deployed south of the present Leentjiesklip, while on the opposite side they were deployed in the vicinity of the post house. The cavalry was deployed to the north of the bay, while the artillery was forward of the infantry and the Khoi troops on the eastern shore of the bay.²³⁹ That evening a cutter from the *Dordrecht* was despatched to fetch some of the sick men from Schaapen Island, but the quartermasters and the whole crew deserted to the British. The *Dordrecht* had now lost 24 men to desertion.²⁴⁰

Lucas summoned his officers to a *Krijgsraad* onboard the *Dordrecht*. It only convened at 23:00 and he told them that the British had fourteen ships, eight ships of the line (the *Jupiter* was counted as a ship of the line) and six other ships, while 4000 troops were encamped around the bay – this against their three ships of the line and five smaller warships. Even more pitiful, British records afterwards indicated that the Dutch had less than two thousand sailors and soldiers onboard (it was 1974 on 19 August), while the crews of the British warships must have been far more than double that number!²⁴¹

After Lucas read Elphinstone's demands an intense debate followed on how they landed in this dreadful situation ("deze akelige omstandigheden"), with an overwhelming force to seaward and no chance of retreating landward. Realistically, most argued that the odds were stacked against them. Their crews were inadequate and poor, many men died on the voyage, quite a number deserted, while a large number was still ill (80 on *Tromp* and 50 on *Cyrene* alone). In addition, some crews became mutinous when the British appeared, were unruly and

²³⁵ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Lucas and Lucas – Elphinstone, 16/8/1796, pp.441-2.

²³⁶ NAUK ADM51/4475, Captains Logs, A Journal of the proceedings of his Majesty's Ship *Monarch*, for the period 18/3/1795 to 18/3/1797, see 17/8/1795.

²³⁷ A. Allardyce, *Memoir of Elphinstone*, pp.123-4.

²³⁸ NAN 2.01.29.03.57, C. Benedictus, *Journal der reis met s'Lands schip Dordrecht ...*, 16/8/1796.

²³⁹ NAN 2.01.29.03.44, Map 1 (no title), attached to E. Lucas, *Journal gehouden aan boord van s'Lands schip Dordrecht...*, 25/1/1796 – 18/8/1796.

²⁴⁰ A.J. Knock, *Uit Liefde voor Vaderland en Vrijheid*, pp.160-1.

bent on destroying property: "... die reeds op 't gezigt der groote Engelse vloot in de mond der baay geankerd lag, begonnen te muyten, alle de luyken open te breeken, de goederen die in 't ruym lagen te ruineeren, te drinken, malkanderen te schoppen en te slaan, Oranje liedjes te zingen en andere oproerige bewegingen te maaken...".²⁴² A few NCO's even indicated that they would rather shoot their officers than fire at the enemy.

Lucas and his officers considered their options. Some Captains wished to beach their ships and set them alight rather than surrender to the British, while others thought they should set sail and try to make a fighting escape, specifically as they had the wind from astern. The wind they certainly had, and the records kept onboard a number of the ships indicate that a fresh south-easterly wind blew, which constituted a "steady breeze".²⁴³ Most of the Captains argued that since the British had an overwhelming force, it would be better to negotiate a good capitulation for them.²⁴⁴ As the bay was bottled-up by a superior naval force, a large enemy force was ashore and the Dutch crews were mutinous, they eventually decided (after a long discussion) that there was no alternative but to capitulate in order to prevent a massacre.²⁴⁵ The meeting ended at 02:00.

It is important to note that the British ships were heavier than the Dutch ships and they had a clear superiority in guns. As they effectively blocked the entrance to the bay, it would have been very difficult for the Dutch ships to make a fighting escape and the only conditions which might have helped them, was a severe gale from the south, as they could then have tried to make a running and fighting break-out. No doubt, most important in the reasoning of the Dutch officers was the simple naval arithmetic – bigger ships, with more guns, will destroy smaller ships with fewer guns!

On 17 August at 09:00 Captain Claris and Lieutenant Moller took the message to Elphinstone. Lucas signalled all his Captains to convene on the *Dordrecht*. For the whole day white flags flew from the main topgallant masts of both flagships. Claris and Moller returned at 16:00 and the *Krijgsraad* commenced immediately. Claris reported that an agreement was reached: They had to surrender their ships intact. Officers and cadets could keep their personal belongings and private weapons. They would be transported to the Cape and then to the Netherlands in a cartel ship on the provision that they undertook not to continue the war.

²⁴¹ Keith Papers, I, Elphinstone – Admiralty, 19/8/1796, p.452.

²⁴² A.J. Knock, *Uit Liefde voor Vaderland en Vrijheid*, pp.162-3.

²⁴³ See for example NAUK ADM51/4475, A Journal of the proceedings ... *Monarch*, 17/8/1796; as well as R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, p.33.

²⁴⁴ NAN 2.01.29.03.28, J.J. Melvill, Journaal gehouden ... *Dordrecht...*, see 16 and 17/8/1796.

²⁴⁵ J.C. Mollema, *Geschiedenis van Nederland ter Zee*, III, p.376.

Elphinstone added if they did not agree with his articles, “you will be pleased to order the Flag of Truce to be hauled down, as a signal that either party may commence hostilities”.²⁴⁶ Some Dutch Captains reported unruly behaviour, stating several crewmembers had donned Orange sashes amidst calls of “Oranje boven”, while they threatened with violent action and even prepared nooses to hang some officers. To Lucas and his officers capitulation was the only alternative. At 17:00 Valkenburg conveyed the message to the British.²⁴⁷

Lucas wrote to Elphinstone that due to mutinous conditions onboard the Dutch ships, he could not guarantee their safety anymore and requested Elphinstone to take possession of the ships, the sooner the better: “Ik verzoek vervolgens dat gij hoe eerder hoe beter bezit van onze schepen neemt, alzoo ik niet langer kan verantwoordelijk zijn voor een hoop volk ...”.²⁴⁸ In Knock’s opinion Lucas was more worried about his 300 “ankers” wine, than the welfare of his ships and men.

Between 21:00 and 22:00 on 17 August the Batavian flags were lowered and a few British ships moved in amongst the squadron. Most of the Dutch journals reflect the disorderly and mutinous situations on the ships. On *Revolutie* and *Dordrecht* things were chaotic, while onboard the *Havik* it was more orderly and the crew only started to loot and get out of hand after the Captain brought news of the capitulation.²⁴⁹ On the *Castor* things were still in hand on 16 August, but on the evening of 17 August the crew sang Orange songs, stated their support for the Prince of Orange and threatened to hang Knock. They broke the hatches, took the wine from the hold, drank, burned the Batavian flag, fought with each other, threatened the officers and badly assaulted some of the NCO’s. The officers armed themselves and while some sought safety in locked cabins, others stood guard through the night, while the crew abused and threatened them. The chaos ensued to about 05:00 the next morning and at 07:00 a British officer and some seamen arrived onboard to hoist the British flag.²⁵⁰

Parkinson judged the whole affair so well by stating: “Perhaps no force ever went to its doom so inevitably”.²⁵¹

²⁴⁶ Keith Papers, I, Elphinstone – Lucas, 17/8/1796, pp.442-3.

²⁴⁷ J.C. Mollema, *Geschiedenis van Nederland ter Zee*, III, p.377.

²⁴⁸ A.J. Knock, *Uit Liefde voor Vaderland en Vrijheid*, Lucas – Elphinstone, 17/8/1796, pp.168-9.

²⁴⁹ IMH Milo120, *Diverse scheepsjournalen*, Hr Ms *Revolutie*, *Dordrecht*, *Castor*, *Bellona*, *Havik*, *Vrouw Maria*, *Braave en Cyron*, dd 1796, *Havik*, see 15/8/1796 to 18/8/1796.

²⁵⁰ A.J. Knock, *Uit Liefde voor Vaderland en Vrijheid*, pp.163 and 169-71.

²⁵¹ C.N. Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas, 1793-1815*, p.85.

6.3. After the Surrender

When the British boarded the Dutch ships, they found them in poor fighting condition, in a “state of mutiny, and in the act of laying violent hands on their officers, towards whom they had lost all sense of respect”. Percival saw the British as the saviours, stating that “our people were obliged to interfere in order to rescue unfortunate Dutch officers from destruction”.²⁵² When British officers inspected the ships and their armaments, Dutch officers were surprised to learn that the British had good knowledge of their “secret” expedition, its commanders, its secret signals with the French, the ships participating and their strength. A British prize crew was placed onboard the *Castor* on 21 August and to Knock’s surprise the first flogging (for theft) occurred the very next day, while two days later another four men were flogged for rowdiness and drunkenness. Knock wrote that the British kept strict discipline!²⁵³ This is how navies were run. The British, with their captured ships, departed from Saldanha Bay on the afternoon of 25 August.

Major-General Doyle, who was left in command of Cape Town, held a victory parade in front of the Castle on 23 August, while the batteries fired a victory salute, a *feu de joie*.²⁵⁴ Craig arrived on 26 August and was received with full military honours by the troops and the officers. The next day he reviewed the 19th Regiment on the Grand Parade and a special reception was held at the Castle. That same evening Elphinstone and his fleet presented their prizes in Table Bay. Percival described the scene with more than sufficient British pride: “the appearance they presented was majestic; as a strong breeze carried them in at nine knots ... they all in a regular succession came to anchor before us. The triumph conspicuous among our countrymen on this occasion could only be equalled by the shame and disappointment which the Dutch inhabitants appeared sensibly to feel, on seeing English colours flying over their own”.²⁵⁵

On 1 September the sick Dutch seamen and soldiers were hospitalised, while the crews became prisons of war. Many of the Dutch officers and crewmembers decided to serve in the Royal Navy.²⁵⁶ The Batavian officers were confined to the ships. Lucas and his senior officers were very perturbed about it. He wrote numerous letters to Elphinstone requesting parole for the senior officers, asking to be allowed to go ashore for a few days, stating that they will stick to the conditions as men of honour, but if they break it they would become normal prisoners of

²⁵² R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, p.35.

²⁵³ A.J. Knock, *Uit Liefde voor Vaderland en Vrijheid*, pp.171-2.

²⁵⁴ R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, pp.37-8.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁶ T. Roodhuyzen, *In woelig vaarwater*, p.144.

war.²⁵⁷ The senior officers then received parole, while the junior officers had to stay onboard. They were apparently well provided for by numerous friendly Capetonians who often visited them.

British victory celebrations took place on 21 September. Victory flags were hoisted on all the naval vessels and on the captured Dutch ships, while the ships were dressed overall. At 11:45 the Castle saluted the Royal Navy with a special victory salute of 21 guns. At 13:00 every ship fired 19 guns, while the two flagships (The British and the former Dutch) saluted with 21 guns.²⁵⁸ The Dutch warships captured at Saldanha Bay were taken into Royal Navy service. Some were renamed: the *Revolutie* became the *HMS Prince Friedrich* (64), the *Castor* the *HMS Saldanha* (38), the *Cyrene* the *HMS Laurel* (26) and the *Bellona* the *HMS Vindictive* (24).²⁵⁹

On 8 December 1796 Lucas and seven of his officers eventually sailed from the Cape with the American ship *John*, destined for Hamburg. The following day 210 of his officers, NCO's and their stewards, departed with the cartel ship *de Vrouw Gertruijda*. To the apparent pleasure of Knock and the others, who feared a British ship might capture them and take them to British prisons, they were captured at sea by a French corvette, *La Tactique*. They arrived at St Malo on 8 March 1797 and made their way to the Netherlands.²⁶⁰ Lucas and his officers were less fortunate. They arrived in Plymouth late in February and Lucas wrote two letters to Elphinstone, complaining that they were treated as prisoners of war, which was contrary to the articles of capitulation. As a result Elphinstone must intervene and organise for them to get back to the Netherlands at the first opportunity as they also had no money.²⁶¹ They eventually arrived on the Dutch coast during the night of 23 March 1797. A year earlier Lucas had sailed out as the commander of eight warships, now he returned, sick and broken, in the middle of night with a fishing boat!²⁶²

The States-General received the news about the Lucas fiasco from a British newspaper on 7 November 1796. Lucas was made the scapegoat in the Netherlands, specifically as he did not even try to escape, or defend his squadron.²⁶³ He was arrested and charged with high

²⁵⁷ BL MS350/6/1. Lucas – Elphinstone, 27/8/1796, 3/9/1796 and 21/9/1796.

²⁵⁸ A.J. Knock, *Uit Liefde voor Vaderland en Vrijheid*, p.176.

²⁵⁹ NAUK WO1/320, St Helena, 1795 – 1798, Brooke – Dundas, 18/9/1796, pp.191 and 195. See also J.S. Corbett, *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, I, p.276n; and C.J. de Villiers, *Die Britse Vloot aan die Kaap*, pp.96-7.

²⁶⁰ NAN 2.01.29.03.57, C. Benedictus, *Journal der reise met s'Lands schip Dordrecht...*, 23/2/1796 – 9/12/1796; and A.J. Knock, *Uit Liefde voor Vaderland en Vrijheid*, pp.179-81.

²⁶¹ BL MS350/18/1, Lucas – Elphinstone, 19/2/1797; and BL MS350/19/1, Lucas – Elphinstone, 25/2/1797.

²⁶² T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, p.225.

²⁶³ T. Roodhuyzen, *In woelig vaarwater*, p.144.

treason. Soon afterwards, on 21 June 1797 before a verdict was reached, Lucas died at his birthplace, Schiedam, disillusioned and discredited.²⁶⁴

Milo is unambiguous in his perception of Lucas as a military commander and stated that a study of the relevant sources and primary documentation illustrated that Lucas was “niet slechts een dwaas was geweest, doch erger nog, dat hij blijken had gegeven geen der eigenschappen te bezitten, welke men toch zeer zeker bij een eskadercommandant mag verwachten”. Lucas deviated from his instructions and also did not perform the crucial military functions characteristic of military command during wartime; “... de laksheid en onvergeeflijke slapheid, waarvan Lucas overigens blijk gaf ... pasten in het kader der aanvoering tijdens de Bataafsche Republiek”.²⁶⁵ However, despite his shortcomings as a commander, not only he is to blame. Some of the blame should be apportioned to the Batavian-French diplomacy and the lack of a capable and coordinating political decision-making ability in Paris and The Hague.

The story had a further twist. Lucas told Elphinstone that they were expecting “seven French Ships of the line”,²⁶⁶ and complained to Craig that they were “deceived by the French”.²⁶⁷ The bitter irony of it all was that before Lucas sailed it was already evident that the French were not following. Yet, Paulus never informed him about it and he was letdown by his own government. Still, the saga did not end here. By July 1796 the Batavian Republic did manage to pay the three million Guilders the French required for an expedition to the Cape. But the French Directorate decided it was strategically more important to despatch the squadron under Admiral Villaret de Joyeuse, which the Dutch hoped would go to the Cape, to Ireland at the end of 1796. The French “Irish adventure” failed and after this squadron unsuccessfully returned from Ireland, the tenacious Dutch representatives again tried to induce the French for support. Their efforts only seized after the French Minister of Marine, Truguet, was sacked in July 1797.²⁶⁸

The strategic implications of the elimination of Lucas’ force were well understood. After hearing about it, Governor Brooke of St Helena Island congratulated Henry Dundas on the “most glorious and happy event”.²⁶⁹ Blankett wrote to Spencer with delight, informing him about the surrender of Lucas “without loss of blood and that has preserved our ships in a state of readiness for further service”. Blankett showed good appreciation of the British grand strategic

²⁶⁴ L. Eekhout, *Het Admiralenboek. De vlagofficieren van de Nederlandse marine*, p.113.

²⁶⁵ T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, p.vii.

²⁶⁶ CA A455, Henry Dundas Collection, Elphinstone – Dundas, 19/8/1796.

²⁶⁷ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Craig – Dundas, 29/8/1796, p.449.

²⁶⁸ T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, pp.73-113 and 210-20.

²⁶⁹ NAUK WO1/320, St Helena, 1795 – 1798, Brooke – Dundas, 18/9/1796, pp.191 and 195.

objectives as he ensured Spencer that it “will effectually secure India, and continue this colony in their obedience to the King’s government by the high impression it must give them of the energy and activity of the English”.²⁷⁰ It is obvious that unity of purpose existed amongst the British, as senior politicians and military commanders clearly understood the strategic aim. Despite everything, the British purpose with control of the Cape was to secure India.

When the annual Guildhall Banquet was held in London in November 1796, news of the Lucas debacle had just arrived in Britain. The Lord Mayor praised Lord Spencer as a vigilant naval administrator and the Prince of Orange (present as a guest) apparently rose and remarked to Spencer, “thank you very much for the care you have taken of my squadron under Admiral Lucas”, which as *The Times* reported, “occasioned some mirth”.²⁷¹

Elphinstone was a very capable and natural commander. He always acted with energy and activity; never hesitating when something had to be done. He was quick to praise officers and to have justice done to his subordinates. At times he promoted officers without prior approval from the Admiralty and would motivate it later, while he was also quick to commend officers, as he did with Captain Brisbane of the *Moselle* (who had warned him about the Dutch squadron).²⁷² Elphinstone was also strict, even with flag officers that did not act in the proper way. When two of the transports that sailed with *Jupiter* strayed from the rest of the convoy and did not arrive with the others, Elphinstone was brisk with Rear-Admiral Pringle, telling him that it “alarms me, why had I no report from the Captain of the *Jupiter*”. He then reprimanded Pringle; “Let me beg you will direct officers to be more particular in that essential duty”.²⁷³

Elphinstone is reported to have had strained relations with his army colleagues at times in his career, yet he and Craig worked together well. Their correspondence suggested that both always asked and appreciated the advice of the other, while they certainly acted professionally and in unison as far as their military duties were concerned. The relationship between Elphinstone and the most famous British admiral, Lord Nelson, was not good when Elphinstone was Nelson’s commander in the Mediterranean during the late 1790’s. In Nelson, Elphinstone had an unruly subordinate, while Nelson perceived Elphinstone (now Lord Keith) as lofty. He stated sarcastically in a letter to Captain Troubridge that “we ... are not equal to Keith in his estimation and ought to think it an honour to serve under such a clever man”.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, I, Blankett (wrongly spelt as Blackett) – Spencer, 19/08/1796, pp.276-7.

²⁷¹ Quoted from W.G. Perrin, *Keith Papers*, I, p.232.

²⁷² *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Admiralty, 10/7/1796, p.437.

²⁷³ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Pringle, 26/7/1796, p.433.

²⁷⁴ D. Howarth and S. Howarth, *Nelson. The Immortal Memory*, p.217.

Elphinstone returned to Britain on 7 October 1796. He conducted the maritime defence of the Cape with vigour. By actively seeking out and destroying his enemy, he confirmed British control of the Cape and illustrated to Britain's enemies the virtual impossibility of taking back the Cape with force of arms. In Britain he was hailed for conquering the Cape and capturing the Dutch Fleet, and made a Baron. In February 1812 he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Fleet, and in 1814 he became a Viscount. When Napoleon surrendered to the British after Waterloo, it was to a ship under Lord Keith's command. But his important prisoner, or his graces, did not impress the old Lord Keith. In order to do justice to Elphinstone the last word should perhaps be given to Mahan. He referred to him as "one of the most efficient and active of the generation of naval officers between St Vincent and Nelson".²⁷⁵

7. CONCLUSION

Britain desired to control the Cape and was prepared to provide the resources necessary for its defence; even if it had to be despatched halfway across the world. The VOC never had such resources available and it was not possible for the Dutch State to act in a similar way as they by no means attached the same premium to the Cape. When the Batavian Republic equipped a force to recapture the Cape it was thought that it would occur with French assistance. Yet, this poorly equipped and inadequate force sailed, even though no French support was forthcoming. To actually dispatch such a poor force to the Cape and suppose it to have any chance of success, at best smacks of unrealistic political naivety.

Naval and military command in the eighteenth century was often demanding in the sense that commanders had to have a clear strategic grasp and had to be able to make independent command decisions in the far flung corners of world. Due to its distance from Britain, the commanders at the Cape had certain advantages and disadvantages. It was often difficult to make important decisions without prior consultation with higher authority, while on the other hand they had more freedom of action concerning operational and logistic matters. The British commanders certainly had a clear strategic grasp of what they were doing. The Cape was important for British control of India and the sea route. Therefore it had to be protected and any threat to it had to be eliminated. Strategically the Dutch situation was more ambiguous; Lucas had to retake the Cape, but he also had to do it in co-operation with the French. If the French did not arrive, he had to go to Mauritius, yet he was never told that the French would not follow.

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A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire*, I, p.286.

Elphinstone was very successful at the Cape and served Britain well. He conquered the Cape, which caused much relief to the British Government and powerful British commercial interests, his ships then patrolled the surrounding oceans, supported the Royal Naval squadron in India and when the ill-fated Lucas expedition appeared off the Cape, he neutralised the threat. Thereby he illustrated to Britain's enemies that Britain was prepared to act with impunity against any endeavour to take the Cape with force or threaten her worldwide maritime interest.

In execution, and operationally, the Lucas expedition was a sad affair, doomed without French assistance. The Dutch failed to grasp and apply the wisdom that had existed amongst the English concerning expeditions to a foreign soil since Elizabethan times.²⁷⁶ They lost secrecy in planning the expedition, organisationally they were not adequately prepared and their fleet was too weak. As the British naval theorist Admiral Colomb emphasized, such expeditions must be accompanied by overwhelming naval force to achieve command of the sea as well as sufficient troops to make attacks successful.²⁷⁷ The Lucas expedition failed on both accounts. Due to much dissent and ill discipline, their decision-making process was often cumbersome and wasted time. Also, in terms of the will and the ability of the military commanders to achieve their objectives, the expedition was a failure.

Though some fire was exchanged, no naval battle took place in Saldanha Bay. The Royal Navy was the superior force due to its tactical and operational skills, good leadership, strong tradition, professionalism, confidence, experience and discipline. The Dutch were unsure due to politics, their naval organisation was disrupted due to the revolution and political change, their discipline was poor and they lacked experience. Lucas might have stood a chance to escape in the heavy sea-conditions with some of his ships, if he had put to sea under the cover of darkness and ran for Mauritius. But due to his inactivity, uncertainty and the command and control problems in his force, he was bottled up and had to surrender.

To be successful in military terms is usually hard work and is not the result of inertia. Blankett clearly understood it as he correctly linked their success to British "energy and activity", which in fact was a crucial variable in the British feat of arms at the Cape.²⁷⁸ When naval squadrons deployed, good teamwork, seamanship and fleet work were crucial to make them into effective tactical units.²⁷⁹ Elphinstone and his captains were excellent on this score as they handled their ships well, took them to sea despite very trying conditions and ensured cohesion

²⁷⁶ S.W. Roskill, *The Strategy of Sea Power*, pp.28-29.

²⁷⁷ P.H. Colomb, *Naval Warfare, Its Ruling Principles and Practice historically Treated*, pp.219-20.

²⁷⁸ *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, I, Blankett – Spencer, 19/08/1796, pp.276-7.

²⁷⁹ S.B.A. Willis, 'Fleet Performance and Capabilities in the Eighteenth Century Royal Navy' in *War in History*, 11 (4), 2004, pp.374-5, 385 and 388.

by working together. On this score, Lucas and his officers also failed. They had many problems, lacked the energy and initiative necessary, their ships were in a poor condition, the crews were not loyal and no real cohesion existed. Such cohesion, however, is cemented by good leadership and professionalism. On both these scores the discrepancy is conspicuous.

The distinction in stature between the British and Batavian command is striking. The Royal Navy had three experienced and redoubtable senior commanders present (Elphinstone, Pringle and Blankett). Elphinstone specifically was administratively and organisationally a skilled commander, while he also had the ability to act with vigour if necessary. He energetically prepared and applied his ships, getting them ready for action and exerted himself to find and neutralise his enemy. Lucas was relatively inexperienced and certainly junior to any of these officers in command experience and service, while he had none of the inherent command attributes which one could expect from a squadron commander. In military terms the discrepancy was even more glaring as the British had no less than four generals at the Cape (two Major-Generals and two Brigadiers); while the senior Dutch army officer was a Lieutenant-Colonel, and they had only four field guns!²⁸⁰

The same discrepancy also existed in intelligence. The Dutch failed to keep the expedition secret and British cruisers picked them up the moment they left port. The British despatched a frigate to warn the Cape, while Captain Brisbane also conveyed important intelligence to Elphinstone. Furthermore, the Dutch ships were noticed as they approached the Cape West Coast, even before entering Saldanha Bay. In comparison Dutch intelligence was poor, they did not keep the expedition secret, did not move out quickly enough, uncertainty existed about French support and Lucas was uninformed. This contributed to his indecision and inertia in Saldanha Bay. Dutch intelligence about the Royal Navy failed and even though Lucas had reports of between eleven and thirteen British ships, he refused to accept it, as he considered the messenger a spy. The disastrous episode in Saldanha Bay is justly described by Milo as “een zwarte kool” in the annals of Dutch naval history.²⁸¹

In the great age of sail the navies of the maritime empires usually attempted to establish control of the sea, which required the destruction of an enemy's fleet. They also had to protect trade and maritime communications and place as much limitations as possible on the maritime ability of an enemy.²⁸² If, however an enemy's fleet emerged and it was possible to destroy it, the objectives could be achieved with even more ease. This was exactly the opportunity the

²⁸⁰ Keith Papers, I, Elphinstone – Admiralty, 19/8/1796, p.453.

²⁸¹ T.H. Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche ...*, p.ix.

Lucas fiasco provided to the British – their elation at its outcome was therefore understandable. The surrender of Lucas formed part of that process through which Britain established naval mastery, specifically if seen together with the later elimination of the Dutch Navy. It also negated any real threat to the security of the Cape. As always in the colonial struggles between Britain and her European rivals, sea power ultimately decided the outcome.²⁸³ The Royal Navy's ability to contain her enemies' fleets within European waters or to punish them severely whenever they emerged, in this case turned the scale and determined the fate of the Cape.

However, the war still lasted until 1802. In the following chapter the focus will be on the consolidation of British authority and their defence of the Cape, up to its return to the Netherlands.

²⁸² A. Van Hengel, 'Het Karakter van den Zeeoorlog en de Bescherming van de Handelsscheepvaart' in *Marineblad*, 39 (1924), p.444.

²⁸³ P.M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, p.129.

Chapter 10

THE MILITARY VALUE OF THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE TO BRITAIN, 1796-1803

1. INTRODUCTION

By the late 1790's trade with India was crucial to Britain and had to be maintained and defended in accordance with the "new British policy of commercial empire ... [as] India was the focal point and thus the Cape assumed a strategical importance in the eyes of the British statesmen that was commercial as well as military".¹ This was exactly the sentiment of British politicians, soldiers and colonial administrators of the time, as the remarks of influential personages like Henry Dundas and Lord Macartney indicate. Barrow, probably the most enthusiastic proponent of the value the Cape had for Britain, referred to it as the "grand outwork of all the European possessions in India"; in fact he stated it was "an acquisition by which our political and commercial interests in the East Indies had been secured and promoted".²

Because of its strategic role and its location the Cape had to be defended against a maritime onslaught. Britain had the will and the resources to do it. They maintained a substantial number of troops at the Cape under capable and professional leadership, the fixed defences were improved and well maintained, and from the Cape military reinforcements were also despatched to support the empire elsewhere. The British administration quelled internal disturbances and rebellions, while even if their actions did not contribute to solving the problems of the colony, they would not allow such matters to interfere with their primary task – maintaining the Cape for the security of the empire.

The British naval historian Lewis stated the period under discussion could be described as the era of "the Navy against the World".³ Though a very British perspective, there is truth in it; as Mahan highlighted: Britain could only maintain itself against France and its mighty army because the Royal Navy stood between Britain and the *Grand Armée*.⁴

¹ A.P. Newton and E.A. Benians, (eds), *Cambridge History of the British Empire*, VIII, p.168,

² J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, p.4.

³ M. Lewis, *History of the British Navy*, p.152.

⁴ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire*, II, p.118.

The British had to maintain their navy, not only for the defence of the British Isles, but for the protection of their global interests. Without seaborne trade they would not have been able to maintain their standing as a nation and their economy would have collapsed. Once again Mahan was accurate, as he emphasised that “the necessity of a navy in the restricted sense of the word springs ... from the existence of a peaceful shipping, and disappears with it”.⁵ When war broke out, there had to be a narrow link between a navy and commercial shipping, as navies defended own trade and attacked the trade of an enemy. The necessity of maintaining a strong Royal Navy was therefore obvious as it was not only a tool for the protection of trade, but also sought out and destroyed enemies, made maritime power projection to farthest reaches of the empire possible and defended the empire against the overtures of adversaries. A great deal of this defensive activity was not defence as a result of direct attacks on British positions – it was rather defence as part of a “wearing-down struggle” conducted by the British. By constantly attacking an enemy’s seaborne trade and eliminating its naval capacity, its ability to be a threat or conduct hostile operations, were severely hampered. No state could even consider projecting its power across the oceans or conducting maritime operations without adequate warships, enough supply ships to ferry men and material and if not in command of the sea, or at least control of the sea within the theatre of operations. Once again, judging from their actions, it seems that British decision makers of the time understood it well.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of British defence of the Cape after the Lucas expedition and of the role the Royal Navy squadron at the Cape played. It therefore commences with a discussion of the consolidation of the British Eastern Empire and the value of the Cape to Britain. The focus will then fall on the British power at the Cape, the internal situation and the British defence organisation. As maritime power was so important in this war, the role of the Royal Navy squadron at the Cape and their operational responsibilities will form a large part of the discussion. The chapter is set against the relevant international background and brief attention will finally be given to the return of the Cape to the Netherlands.

2. BRITISH STRATEGY, THE CONDUCT OF THE WAR AND THE VALUE OF THE CAPE

Britain now had control of the Cape and by splendidly defending it against a threat they illustrated exactly what could be achieved with superior sea power. Furthermore, the fixed

⁵ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*, p.26.

defences were improved, a large garrison was maintained at the Cape and a naval squadron was stationed at the Cape. All this was quite expensive to the Crown; specifically as control of the Cape was not commercially viable. Beyond the Cape Britain faced powerful continental enemies and was involved in a massive ongoing struggle. So, how was Britain doing in the war? Was the capture and defence of the Cape worth the effort, and why was it so important?

On land the French achieved dramatic successes against their continental opponents in the fiercely contested Wars of the French Revolution, thanks to the brilliant generalship of Napoleon Bonaparte. The only way in which Britain could counter the French military success was with the war at sea. The Royal Navy was perceived as a great force standing between Britain and disastrous defeat at the hands of the more powerful French Army.⁶ Indeed, there is much truth in the axiomatic depiction of Britain in these years standing with her back against the wall, only protected by a powerful navy.

As France dominating the war on the European continent, the British policy was not to get involved in an expensive land war against a powerful army, but to focus on sea power. They had two objectives: The first was to cut the French from the rest of the world and cause her economic ruin. This did not succeed and when the French-British peace was concluded in 1802 France was not economically ruined, so while the navy was a great instrument in defence, it could not decisively strike at France. Secondly, they wished to capture many of the former colonial possession of France and her allies. In this Britain succeeded and as a result they increased their trade and enhanced British sea power.

Nevertheless, Britain experienced many difficulties and much anxiety by standing against such a strong enemy. With the Netherlands and Spain both in the French camp by the middle of 1796, the naval balance was unfavourable to Britain. Furthermore, Britain was forced to leave the Mediterranean in 1796, Ireland was on the verge of rebellion with the French set to provide support, France commenced with preparations for an invasion of Britain, and to make matters worse, the Royal Navy experienced a great mutiny between April and June 1797.⁷ However, things would look up for Britain again because of sea power. The Royal Navy managed to achieve a number of great successes under admirals like Jervis (Lord St Vincent), Duncan and Nelson. They defeated a Spanish fleet at the Battle of St Vincent and the Batavian Navy at

⁶ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire*, I, p.327.

⁷ R. Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare*, pp.269-70; and G.D. Scholtz, *Suid-Afrika en die Wêreldpolitiek*, p.89.

Camperdown – both occurred in 1797. Though Ireland erupted in open rebellion by 1798, French support had failed and the plan to invade Britain was abandoned in February 1798.⁸

Naval force and merchant marine was necessary for maritime power projection, and by eliminating the instruments that had to project their enemy's power, the British safeguarded their imperial and commercial interests and defended their dominions. Britain would definitely not tolerate French control of the Dutch colonial empire, and would utilise her superior naval power to prevent it.⁹ As Mahan stated, “the imposing attitude maintained by Great Britain throughout this tremendous contest depended absolutely and wholly upon the control of the sea – Sea Power”. Indeed in order to be able to maintain control of the Cape and safeguard the empire, they had no alternative. Britain's strength was in her commerce, but only because commerce and empire were secured by a powerful navy. As Mahan so vividly emphasised, as long as this breastplate was in place, “Britain was – not invulnerable – but invincible”.¹⁰

It is against this background that the utility of the Cape to the British must be seen. Britain's great objective was to isolate France on the European continent, while her allies conducted the land war with France. The task of the Royal Navy was to eliminate the French at sea, in other parts of the world, and protect British commerce – but to do this they required well protected and garrisoned bases such as Gibraltar and the Cape of Good Hope.¹¹

From a military strategic point of view the Cape enhanced the security of the Empire as troops could be despatched to South America, the West Indies, the Indian Ocean and the East Indies in a relatively short time.¹² The Cape was also important for maintaining St Helena. In a letter to the First Lord (Spencer), Blankett warned that shipping from the East would be easy prey to a hostile squadron operated from the Cape. Spencer shared this concern with Dundas who immediately put him at ease, stating “my mind is long and invariably made up to the conviction that the Cape of Good Hope is in truth and literally so the key to the India and China”.¹³

After the capture of the Cape, Ceylon and other VOC possessions in the East, Dutch trade was much inhibited and as Percival stated: their ships could not “venture into those seas without being picked up by our cruisers; the supplies from Holland to their settlements here must

⁸ R. Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare*, p.270.

⁹ G.J.A. Raven and N.A.M. Rodger, *Navies and Armies*, p.53.

¹⁰ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire*, I, pp.236, 327.

¹¹ H.W. Richmond, *Imperial Defence and Capture at Sea in War*, pp.113-5.

¹² BL MS061/1, J. Barrow, Sketches ... 4, Military Establishment 1796, p.192.

¹³ *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, II, Dundas – Spencer, 5/11/1797, p.215.

be scanty and precarious".¹⁴ For many of the companies and nations at peace with Britain and trading with the East, the Cape maintained its important function as a post of refreshment. In the briefing that Barrow prepared for Lord Macartney on the Cape, he emphasised that the produce of the Cape was an essential requirement for "the vessels of every nation trading to the East Indies..."¹⁵

Charles Grant, Director of the EEIC, wrote to Dundas in 1796 that the Cape should become a permanent possession of the British Empire due to its prime location and its value to British interest. Grant warned if they wished to maintain and defend the Cape "as the key to India" it required a "strong force – magazine of war-like stores and ships-of-war – making it a seasoning station for European troops destined for India, and, in a word, as a grand fortress to command and overawe that country and to discourage & repress the designs of European powers against our interests there".¹⁶ About a year later Macartney told Dundas that British control of the Cape was in the interest of the EEIC, as they gained a secure position for their communications with the East and a potential market. It was "worth infinitely more to them than any apprehended expense which its maintenance could involve".¹⁷

This was the outlook amongst British decision makers when Earl Macartney took the oath as Governor of the Cape Colony on 6 May 1797. Macartney was an administrator and diplomat of note. He had distinguished himself as envoy to Russia and China, served as Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and was Governor of Madras. The fact that he was appointed to govern the Cape, gave some indication of the importance Henry Dundas attached to the Cape.¹⁸ Macartney had a clear strategic grasp of the value of the Cape to the British Empire, understood the Dutch strategic position and realised that Britain had to limit French power in the East. In a very insightful letter to Dundas, written in October 1797, he explained his views as follows:

"The power and influence of Holland appear to me so irretrievable, that it is impossible she can ever again hold an independent possession of the Cape. Indeed before the war, she was neither rich enough to maintain its establishments, nor strong enough to govern its people and, I believe had it not been for our conquest of the country, it would soon have attempted to become independent... The French (... our natural enemies) can only wish to have the Cape either in their own hands, or in those of a weak power, that they may use it as an instrument towards our destruction ... Of this I am so perfectly convinced, that if it shall be found impracticable for us to retain the sovereignty of the Cape, and the French are to become the masters of it ... we must

¹⁴ R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, p.319.

¹⁵ BL, MS 061/1, J. Barrow, *Sketches ... 1*, Geographical description, p.52.

¹⁶ M. Boucher and N. Penn (eds), *Britain at the Cape*, Grant – H. Dundas, c 1796, pp.80-4.

¹⁷ *Records of the Cape Colony*, II, Macartney – H. Dundas, 19/6/1798, pp.265-6.

¹⁸ S.F.N. Gie, 'The Cape Colony under Company Rule, 1708-1795' in E.A. Walker (ed), *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, p.183.

totally alter our present system and adopt such measures as will shut them out of India entirely, and render the possession of the Cape and of the Isles of France and Bourbon of as little use to them as possible".¹⁹

The value of the Cape was in its strategic position and Macartney also understood the economic burden its administration required. He never thought a profit could be made from its small population with its limited resources:

"It does not indeed appear that this Colony is ever likely to become a source of very abundant revenue. Its chief importance to us arises from its geographical position, from its forming the master link of connection between the western and eastern world, from its being the great outwork of our Asiatic commerce and Indian Empire, and above all from the conviction that, if in the hands of a powerful enemy, it might enable him to shake to the foundation, perhaps overturn and destroy the whole fabrick of our oriental opulence and dominion ... its immediate political, naval and military advantages are so striking, and of such splendour, that every other consideration is for the moment almost extinguished in the blaze".²⁰

Perhaps Macartney had underestimated the cost of maintaining the Cape. In a letter to Dundas on 15 December 1797 he confirmed the value of the Cape for the security of India, yet it was done "with a very great expense [and] not a little embarrassment". Two months later (February 1798) Macartney stated if Britain had to choose between the Cape and Ceylon, then he suggested that "the preference would preponderate in favour of Ceylon".²¹ Dundas however had clarity in his mind about the Cape-Ceylon issue: when asked by Prime Minister William Pitt late in 1796 which of the two should Britain keep if they had to choose, Dundas answered "Both".²²

In 1797 talks to explore a possible peace agreement between the belligerents were held. One of the reasons why these negotiations failed was because both Britain and France were not prepared to return some of their territorial conquests. At negotiations in Lille, French reaction was interesting. When Lord Malmesbury maintained that Britain would keep Trincomalee and the Cape, Delacroix (France) retorted that these places were of more value to Britain than the Netherlands to France. If Britain maintained them, French possessions in India and the French islands in the Indian Ocean "will be entirely at the tenure of your [British] will and pleasure".²³

Napoleon apparently stated in September 1797 if they had to give up the Cape of Good Hope, then France should take Egypt. In the meantime Napoleon devised a grand scheme to control the Orient as he realised he could do Britain much damage if he could sever her link with

¹⁹ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, p.154.

²⁰ *Records of the Cape Colony*, II, Macartney – H. Dundas, 10/7/1797, p.114.

²¹ L.C.F. Turner, *The Cape of Good Hope and the Trafalgar Campaign*, Macartney – Dundas, 15/12/1797 and 4/2/1797, pp.149-50.

²² L.C.F. Turner, *The Cape of Good Hope and the Trafalgar Campaign*, p.150.

²³ Quoted in L.C.F. Turner, *The Cape of Good Hope and the Trafalgar Campaign*, p.145.

the source of her wealth, India. As he first had to control Egypt, he left France with a fleet in May 1798. The purpose of his expedition was to seize Egypt, destroy British trading posts in the Red Sea and obtain control of it for France. In Egypt he initially wiped local resistance away and it was a great shock for the British as they thought he threatened their possession of India in co-operation with Tipu Sahib. Tipu (also referred to as Tippoo Sultan), the son of Haidar Ali, was the local Muslim ruler of Mysore, an archenemy of Britain and an ally of France.²⁴ He was in constant war with the British and if French support could reach him, they might be able to drive the British from India.²⁵ Though French support could have arrived from Mauritius or via Egypt, both these avenues could be blocked by British sea power.

The Governor of Mauritius had apparently notified Tipu Sahib earlier that if he wished to conclude an alliance with France, he had to carry the cost of French troops and that he should not declare war before the French would be ready to come to his assistance. This news had reached the Cape in March 1798 and London about two months later. As a result Admiral Christian at the Cape and others warned the Admiralty that the expedition (Napoleon's) was being fitted out in Toulon was probably destined for India, either round the Cape, through the Red Sea, or via Basra. Christian assured Spencer that he would despatch warships to cruise the coast of South America to give him timely warning of any French squadron, while he would keep his force at the Cape at the ready to support Admiral Rainier in India.²⁶

It was feared that Napoleon might move via the Red Sea to India before British reinforcements, going around the Cape of Good Hope, could reach there. It was possible at the time to acquire enough shipping in the Red Sea to make such an undertaking practicable.²⁷ In order to further strengthen the British position, Commodore Blankett was despatched from Britain to the Red Sea with a squadron in June 1798. In India the Governor-General, Marquis Wellesley the Earl of Mornington, resolved to conduct the war against Tipu with more vigour.

In the meantime the tenacious Rear-Admiral Horatio Nelson was pursuing the French fleet across the Mediterranean. He eventually caught up with the numerically superior French fleet, under Vice-Admiral Brueys, and completely defeated it at the Battle of the Nile in Abo Qir Bay, on 1-2 August 1798.²⁸ News of this great naval victory was received with much relief as the British regained control of the Mediterranean; it severed Napoleon's line of communications

²⁴ H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind*, p.69.

²⁵ G.D. Scholtz, *Suid-Afrika en die Wêreldpolitiek*, p.90.

²⁶ H.W. Richmond (ed), *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, IV, pp.153-4; and Christian – Spencer, 31/03/1798, pp.167-8.

²⁷ H.W. Richmond, *Statesmen and Sea Power*, p.261.

²⁸ D. Howarth and S. Howarth, *Nelson. The Immortal Memory*, pp.194-200.

with France and made large scale French operations in the Middle East and the East virtually impossible. Napoleon was forced to abandon his expedition – his Oriental dream was over. In India the British also defeated Tipu, due to the capable military skills of Arthur Wellesley (the later Duke of Wellington and the Governor-General's brother). Tipu fell defending his capital, Seringapatam, on 4 May 1799.²⁹ To counter this threat, the Royal Navy had literally acted in a great pincer around Africa: while Nelson defeated the French fleet in the Mediterranean, in the Indian Ocean and in the Arabian Sea the navy was present to block the French in case they made a move.

Wellesley was ambitiously placing British authority in India on a more secure footing, but it required healthy soldiers. A direct passage from Britain rendered soldiers unfit for conflict for a considerable time as they suffered severely from scurvy and other ailments on their arrival in India. Hence, they had to recuperate along the route and stopping at the Cape improved their health so considerable that Wellesley noted that troops that were stationed at the Cape would be in a better physical condition than in Britain, and their exposure to the "ardent sun" for a year of two was good preparation for the Indian climate.³⁰ The "great utility" of the Cape, he stated, was "as an outpost to our Indian Empire, and a depot from which seasoned troops may suddenly be drawn for the defence of our possessions in the East in any emergency".³¹

Wellesley suggested to Henry Dundas in 1798 that one should not only consider the direct value of the Cape to Britain, but "...must look for its value in the positive advantages it would afford to the enemy or a military and naval station for offensive purpose against you".³² Admiral Curtis concurred with Wellesley; to him the value of the Cape to Britain was as a base or a post and it had to be viewed against the disadvantage it would have in enemy hands, which were "very distinctive from colonial considerations".³³

Wellesley had much clarity about the defence of India against maritime power projection – it primarily had to be done with naval power. In his conception the naval squadron at the Cape had a role to play as they firstly had to intercept French forces in the southern oceans, en route from Spanish South America or in the vicinity of Mauritius; while secondly they had to assist with

²⁹ J. Black, *Cambridge Illustrated Atlas*, p.162; and H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind*, p.69.

³⁰ A.J. Guy, 'British Strategy and the Cape' in P.B. Boyden, et al (eds), *"Ashes and Blood" The British Army*, I, pp.33-4.

³¹ *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, IV, Mornington (Wellesley) – Yonge, 24/10/1800, p.163.

³² A.J. Guy, 'British Strategy and the Cape' in P.B. Boyden, et al (eds), *"Ashes and Blood" The British Army*, I, p.33.

³³ *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, IV, Curtis – Spencer, 12/10/1800, pp.207-9.

capturing Mauritius to decisively eliminate the threat.³⁴ Wellesley's outlook was typically British as he saw naval forces as the first line and primary defence against invasion.

Mauritius and Reunion (Bourbon) was a thorn in the flesh of the British interests in the East and French privateers from the Islands were a menace to British shipping. As a result, the first expedition against Mauritius was already considered in 1747. In 1794 and in 1796 it was again considered, but never took place. Ships from the Cape station had to cruise off Mauritius, but as they could not maintain a constant blockade, Vice-Admiral Rainier, Commander-in-Chief in the East Indies, requested in December 1799 that they step-up patrols to "obstruct as much as possible the sailing of their cruisers and privateers ... [as] a measure of great advantage to his Majesty's service ...".³⁵ As Mauritius could serve as a base for a French expedition to India, Wellesley wished to eliminate the threat and suggested to Rainier and Curtis (at the Cape) that they should combine their resources and attack Mauritius. Both admirals, however, dissuaded the Governor-General from this undertaking.³⁶

The EEIC was initially very positive towards the Cape; in fact it was partly as a result of their constant pressure that the Cape was captured. The Directors of the EEIC regarded the Cape as an important place for refreshment, but were not interested in the expense of its upkeep. By the late 1790's their attitude changed due to the more relaxed approach to trade of the British administration at the Cape. As Turner stated, they became "positively hostile" towards the Cape.³⁷ They tried to show that their ships did not need the Cape and ordered them not to refresh at the Cape, which resulted in much illness onboard (Barrow stressed it was specifically amongst Indian crewmembers, not hardy English tars!).³⁸ Ships were often in distress due to bad weather in the southern seas and needed the Cape as "a place to hide", as the case of the EEIC East Indiaman *Countess of Sutherland* illustrated. She was severely damaged in a gale, lost all her masts, nearly sank and drifted for several days. Her crew managed to fix a jury mast and put into St Francis Bay for fresh water and provisions. As they proceeded to Simon's Bay for repairs, they were again hit by a severe gale and if the *HMS Adamant* (Captain Hotham) did not take her in tow, she would have perished on the rocky coast. At the time the value of this single ship and her cargo was about £300 000, more than enough to

³⁴ H.W. Richmond, *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, IV, pp.159-62.

³⁵ *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, IV, Rainier – Spencer, 10/12/1799, pp.203-4.

³⁶ H.W. Richmond, *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, IV, pp.159-62.

³⁷ L.C.F. Turner, 'The Cape of Good Hope and the Anglo-French Conflict, 1797-1806' in *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand*, IX (1961), pp.360-70.

³⁸ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, pp.155-7 and 234-5.

maintain the whole civil and military establishment at the Cape for a year.³⁹ Soon EEIC ships refreshed at the Cape again. By 1803 John Pringle of the EEIC maintained that the Cape was of the “highest importance to the interests of the Honourable Company”.⁴⁰

3. THE INTERNAL SITUATION AT THE CAPE

3.1. **British Administration of the Cape**

In line with his instructions from the War Office, Craig went to much trouble to establish a fair but firm government at the Cape. He was anxious to win the loyalty of the burghers over to His Majesty’s “just and mild Government...” with a series of “earnest and liberal arrangements” aimed at promoting the prosperity of the colony.⁴¹ Oppressive monopolies were prohibited, arrears of land rent were cancelled and freedom of worship guaranteed. He also replaced the Committee of the High Court with a more popular body, the Burgher Senate.

The Crown was now in control of the Cape, yet as Pringle of the EEIC had probably envisaged that he would play an important role in the administrative take-over, a month after the Dutch capitulation, he complained to London that he did not have full knowledge of exactly what was going on.⁴² One of the first problems that also impacted on the relationship with the EEIC was the differences between Blankett and Craig on the right of neutral vessels to trade at the Cape. Craig wished to allow a Danish ship to trade freely in December 1795, but Blankett considered it contrary to the interests of the EEIC. Craig allowed it, perhaps also for political reasons, as he realised that European articles were scarce, and due the depression the economic carrot was a powerful one. However, Craig’s approach also had its dangers. Many foreign ships visited the Cape and some of the supplies might just reach the French islands in the Indian Ocean. As conflict with Craig already existed about the matter, Blankett bitterly complained to Nepean that Craig acted in contradiction with the Navigation Acts.⁴³ Blankett’s efforts to upset Craig’s free trade approach continued and he even used armed guards to prevent trade with some neutral vessels. Craig protested to Dundas that it caused much public

³⁹ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, pp.235-6.

⁴⁰ CA VC58, Letters by J. Pringle, Pringle – Ramsay, 13/1/1803, no 56.

⁴¹ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, War Office – Craig, 15/4/1796, pp.361-2.

⁴² M. Arkin, John Company at the Cape, p.193.

⁴³ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Blankett – Nepean, 4/3/1796, p.334.

“dissatisfaction and discontent” and suggested that the neutral trade should continue under the circumstances.⁴⁴

Pringle suggested that the EEIC provide a China ship annually to trade with the Cape as a need for tea and oriental products existed. Craig did not wish to go into conflict with the EEIC, but argued that “free trade” should be maintained as little commerce existed with Britain and foreign ships that received special permission should be allowed to trade. The issue regarding trade was only settled after Macartney’s arrival. He was given specific orders that provided trade regulations regarding the external trade of the Colony and specified under which conditions foreign goods could be brought in. Furthermore, trade with the East and from the East, could only be done by the EEIC or under its licence. The VOC with its absolute control over foreign trade that have impacted directly on the economy of the Cape was no longer – it was replaced by the EEIC, again “a privileged body of distant merchants ... exercised a minute supervision over all matters concerning the Eastern trade”.⁴⁵

Although it was obvious that the Cape was a British possession that would not be given back, much confusion still existed by 1796 regarding Britain’s stance. Was it in “safe keeping” for the Prince of Orange or not? Macartney clarified the matter to the Burgher Senate: “from the first moment of this Colony’s being possessed by the British Government, it was considered as an object of the highest attention and regard, and a resolution was taken never to abandon it”.⁴⁶ He added that the British objectives were to control the Cape to the benefit of commerce.

British authority was better maintained in the Macartney era than at any other stage and the administration of the colony ran effectively. At the beginning of 1798 the British Garrison consisted of more than 5000 men, while at the end of 1797 the Royal Naval squadron had seven ships of the line, seven frigates, four smaller warships and a supply ship. Though Macartney’s government was respected and feared, it was not popular.⁴⁷ In addition, British authority at the Cape was also reinforced by the flourishing trade, the renewed prosperity and the success Britain achieved at sea against her Dutch and French enemies. It accentuated the fact that the chance of a naval expedition retaking the Cape was very small.

Macartney made it clear to his superiors that the Cape Colony would be expensive as it required a large garrison and a fleet, but that it was a necessary expense. At the same time the local economy boomed because of the war and it experienced unparallel prosperity. Because of

⁴⁴ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Craig – Dundas, 8/3/1796, pp.336-7.

⁴⁵ M. Arkin, *John Company at the Cape*, pp.194-5.

⁴⁶ CA BO149, *Letters Dispatched*, Macartney – Burgher Senaat, 7/6/1797, p.114.

⁴⁷ H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind*, p.66.

the economic development the revenue of the Cape fundamentally increased: it was £25 153 (f125 769) in 1795-96, while on average it was as much as £73 518 between 1797 and 1802.⁴⁸

In November 1797 Macartney asked to be relieved of his duties at the Cape due to his age (he was sixty), ill health and the fact that he had served Britain for forty three years. Macartney recommended the Lieutenant-Governor, Major-General Francis Dundas, as his successor because of his knowledge of the country and his excellent service.⁴⁹ Macartney left a year later. Early morning on Wednesday 21 November 1798, Captain John Osborn of the *Tremendous* ordered his crew to man the yards as the respected Lord Macartney was rowed pass to board the *Stately*. At 10:00 the *Stately* departed for England.⁵⁰

After Macartney's departure, British authority declined. Macartney was an excellent administrator and maintained authority much better than his successors. The short tempered Francis Dundas, who was Acting Governor from November 1798 to December 1799 and again from May 1801 to the British withdrawal in 1803, had no previous experience of administration on this level, and had the knack of falling out with many of the senior officials. The next British Governor was Sir George Yonge (from December 1799 to April 1801). It was apparently well known in British circles that Yonge lacked competence and he was already 70 years old when he became Governor of the Cape.⁵¹ The Yonge administration was ineffective and reminiscent of Van de Graaff. Yonge squandered much money on renovations, building projects and new posts he created. He virtually bankrupted the colonial government and a massive rift developed between him and the military commander, General Dundas. In the end Henry Dundas recalled Yonge late in 1800. He eventually departed in April 1801.

3.2. Security of the Frontier Region

After the surrender of Lucas and with no immediate threat from a large foreign force, Craig felt confident that he had to make a show of force to the Graaff-Reinet burghers. The district was important because the Cape was dependant on it for much of its meat supply. Tension did not only exist due to the issue of British authority, but also because of a worsening security situation and the issue of control over the area between the Fish and Boesman's Rivers. Opinion was

⁴⁸ S.F.N. Gie, 'The Cape Colony under Company Rule, 1708-1795' in E.A. Walker (ed), *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, p.183.

⁴⁹ BL MS052/14, Macartney – H. Dundas, 29/11/1797.

⁵⁰ NAUK ADM51/1357, Captains Logs, Journal of the Proceedings of His Majesty's Ship *Tremendous*, Captain John Osborn Commander, for the period 12/11/1798 to 16/5/1799, see 21/11/1798.

divided between those wanting to accept British authority and those not. Craig dispatched a force of 800 men (including 150 Khoi soldiers) under the command of Major King to Graaff-Reinet on 6 September 1796, not to do battle with the burghers, but to “impress the people with terror and convince them of the practicability of our reaching them...”.⁵² Craig made it clear that the Khoi soldiers should not be impertinent to the burghers, while at the same time it must be apparent that they will be defended against unjust actions. Rebel support was not extensive. As their ammunition supply was cut after the uprising of 1795, it left them very vulnerable to local attacks. Burghers from the northern and western areas decided to accept British authority in August 1796. When Craig received the news, King’s force was recalled, three days after its departure. After some squabbling, by February 1797 the rest of the rebellious burghers (Martinus Prinsloo and his followers) indicated that they would also accept British authority.⁵³

Shortly afterwards, the expectations some had pinned on foreign support for a rebellion against British authority, were smashed. In the middle of 1796, one J.P. von Woyer was picked up by a Danish ship in Algoa Bay and taken to Batavia. He convinced Governor-General Van Overstraaten to provide the burghers on the Frontier with assistance. As a result *’t Haasje*, under the command of De Freyn, sailed from Batavia in February 1797 with roughly 16 500 kilograms of gunpowder, eight field guns and provisions (food, material, sugar, coffee, etc) onboard, destined for Algoa Bay with the purpose of supporting an insurrection.⁵⁴ As *’t Haasje* was a light vessel (a former packet) designed for speed,⁵⁵ she obtained storm damage and had to put into Delagoa Bay. The purpose of her mission leaked to the crew of an “American” whaler, *Hope* (actually British) and on 20 April 1797, after a skirmish between the crews and with Portuguese assistance, *’t Haasje* was captured by the wide-awake and patriotic crew of the *Hope*.⁵⁶

When the two French frigates *La Prudente* and *La Preneuse* clashed with British warships in South African waters during 1799, some at the Cape believed they had to land volunteers and ammunition from Mauritius in support of the burghers. Historians have stated it

⁵¹ H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind*, p.69.

⁵² *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Craig – King, 4/9/1796, p.453.

⁵³ H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind*, p.61; and H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p.74.

⁵⁴ CA A1415 (74), Andrew Barnard – Brooke, 23/8/1797, p.9; and *Records of the Cape Colony*, II, Macartney – H. Dundas, 14/8/1797 pp.149-51.

⁵⁵ J.R. Bruijn et al, *Dutch-Asiatic shipping*, I, p.50.

⁵⁶ *The Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas*, Barnard – Dundas, 16 and 23/8/1797, pp.58 and 65; and *Records of the Cape Colony*, II, Macartney – H. Dundas, 14/10/1797 pp.187-8.

as a fact,⁵⁷ however no proof could be found of it. The saga of these two frigates will be narrated further on.

In the British view there had to be as little contact as possible between the burghers and the Xhosas. One of the problems was that some Xhosa chiefs had established grazing fields in the Zuurveld and refused to cross back over the Fish River. To maintain the frontier was not possible without a large military force or at least a massive defensive system.⁵⁸ Macartney's efforts to maintain a rigid border failed. Just as in the case of the VOC, the British could not effectively control the relationship between the farmers and the Xhosa.

The situation on the Frontier was always turbulent. By late 1798 problems brewed over the inability of the Government to prevent the Xhosa from crossing the Fish River into the Zuurveld with large herds and Marthinus Prinsloo with some of his followers became rebellious. Conflict seemed imminent. General Dundas (Acting Governor) dispatched Brigadier Vandeleur with troops (including 50 Khoi troops) to Graaff-Reinet, while troops under Majors McNab and Abercrombie were dispatched by ship to Algoa Bay. The contingents joined up at Algoa Bay on 8 March 1799. Many of the rebels surrendered, while some were arrested to be trialled in Cape Town. The insurrection was at an end, as the perception that the British were not prepared to send troops, was negated.⁵⁹ An organised military rebellion against the British authority was never a broad based consideration amongst the burgher majority because they were too unorganised and divided and British military power too strong. Officers like Percival had a poor opinion of the burghers as a military adversary, stating they "are neither a warlike nor a hardy race; and are ill-calculated for active service, or where the endurance of hardship is required".⁶⁰

The British quickly learned that control of the Frontier did not only mean restraining a few burghers. When Vandeleur moved through the Zuurveld to Algoa Bay, the Xhosa feared they might be driven back across the Fish River. They attacked farms in the Zuurveld, drove the farmers out and ambushed Vandeleur's column with serious losses. Some of the armed Khoi auxiliaries with the British forces deserted and joined the Xhosa. Vandeleur called-up the Graaff-Reinet and Swellendam commandos. He wished to teach the Xhosa a stern lesson by driving them from the territory west of the Fish River. General Dundas protested – his instructions allowed only defensive wars, not a war of expulsion. Vandeleur had to convince the

⁵⁷ G.M. Theal, *History of South Africa since 1795*, I, pp.64-5; and G.D. Scholtz, *Suid-Afrika en die Wêreldpolitiek*, p.88.

⁵⁸ S.F.N. Gie, 'The Cape Colony under Company Rule, 1708-1795' in E.A. Walker (ed), *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, p.186.

⁵⁹ H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind*, pp.70-7.

⁶⁰ R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, p.316.

Xhosa of British good-will by conciliation, presents and promises. The burghers lost heart as they had little ammunition and were incapable of offering resistance, the southern portion of the Graaff-Reinet district was out of their control, while the most incredible atrocities were committed and the region was completely plundered. General Dundas arrived in September – not to fight but to conciliate. He opened negotiations with the Xhosa and promised that they would be left undisturbed in the Zuurveld. Peace was proclaimed in October. Maynier became Resident-Commissioner in Graaff-Reinet and was supported by a few dragoons and Khoi soldiers.⁶¹

During the second half of 1799 the British created a fortification in Algoa Bay, *Fort Frederick*. Its main purpose was to act as a military base and a place to despatch troops from in emergencies. Between 300 and 400 men under the command of Major Leymoine was initially stationed at this post (its garrison later became smaller). The fort addressed an important deficiency in the defence of the Cape.⁶² To General Dundas securing the frontier region was part of the defence of the colony. In August he wrote (with reference to Algoa Bay) that “our possession of the colony may possibly be at stake if we do not secure a permanent establishment for the frontier of this too extensive colony”.⁶³ He was also careful not to deploy too many troops in the area, as he did not want to weaken the Garrison at the Cape. Order therefore had to prevail on the Frontier to make it easier to focus on the defence of the Cape against an exterior threat. Just like the Dutch the British turned their back to the interior and its issues – what was really important was to defend the Cape against a maritime threat.

Twice the Xhosa and the Khoi rebelled and when the British left, the problem was not solved. General Dundas admitted that he withdrew from war and did not achieve a settlement.⁶⁴ The British had managed to consolidate their authority to such an extent that there was very little resistance amongst the burghers by 1803. General Dundas did what he had to do – hold the Cape. He was not going to become embroiled in campaigns of conquest in Africa.

The relationship between the Khoi population and the burghers were tense during the First British Occupation. Though it is obvious that the British authorities did see the Khoi as their allies in suppressing the burgher uprising in the frontier districts, no proof exist that they prompted the Khoi to plunder or destroy burgher life and property. But as the British did arrive with a considerable number of Khoi troops, it was seen as proof that the Khoi was a powerful

⁶¹ S.F.N. Gie, ‘The Cape Colony under Company Rule, 1708-1795’ in E.A. Walker (ed), *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, pp.188-90.

⁶² *Records of the Cape Colony*, III, F. Dundas – Yonge, 24/2/1800, pp.61-4.

⁶³ *Records of the Cape Colony*, II, F. Dundas – Ross, 10/8/1799, pp.462-3.

⁶⁴ S.F.N. Gie, ‘The Cape Colony under Company Rule, 1708-1795’ in E.A. Walker (ed), *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, p.189.

ally against the burghers. As Giliomee accurately stated this period was a continuation of the previous system: for British imperial interest the Cape was firstly a very important strategic post for its owners.⁶⁵ Policy was aimed at the security of the establishment and for that calm in the interior was necessary – if a divide-and-rule approach was necessary for that, so be it. The Cape had to be a place of security for the empire.

4. THE MILITARY AND NAVAL VALUE OF THE CAPE AS A BASE TO THE BRITISH EMPIRE

The military value of the Cape arose from its geographical location “between the western and eastern world” and Dundas as the Secretary of State for War was convinced that the Cape “... was in truth and literally so the key to the Indian and China ...”.⁶⁶ Macartney added that “its immediate political, naval and military advantages” were striking”.⁶⁷ In this way politicians and colonial administrators had determined the strategic value of the Cape. Yet, what was its military value exactly, and to what extent could it really act as a base to the British Empire?

Inherent to military value of bases were their suitability to maintain land forces and navies, their strategic location, their defensibility and the possibility to project power from such locations. As a military base the Cape was very important to Britain and they did much to place its defence on a proper footing. Due to its climate India was not an ideal place to form recruits into soldiers, while the Cape had a mild and temperate climate and was ideally suited to act as a depot for fitting out, training and preparing British troops for the East. The mortality amongst British troops at the Cape was small compared to other stations and they had few sick soldiers. Even when the Garrison was 5000 strong, Macartney reduced the hospital setup.⁶⁸ Percival considered the Cape climate as one of the “healthiest climates in the world”, and of the 5000 troops quartered at the Cape “scarcely forty were in the general hospital at one time, and very few ... incident to this climate”. As a result it was possible to exercise and train troops regularly and to keep them “strong and healthy” with daily rations of beef, mutton, bread, vegetables and a pint of Cape wine.⁶⁹ Sick soldiers from India quickly recovered at the Cape and it was much cheaper to maintain troops at the Cape as the quality of the rations were good and readily

⁶⁵ H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind*, pp.282-3 and 342.

⁶⁶ *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, II, Dundas – Spencer, 5/11/1797, p.215.

⁶⁷ *Records of the Cape Colony*, II, Macartney – H. Dundas, 10/7/1797, p.114.

⁶⁸ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, pp.158-61 and 164.

⁶⁹ R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, pp.113-4.

available. Despite the fact that the British did experience shortages from time to time (for example the wheat production was less than they expected) its supply capacity was ample.⁷⁰

The so-called “seasoning” of soldiers to a different climate played an important role in British colonial military service at the time, specifically as medicine that made the European more resilient, was only developed later. During 1799 two so-called boy regiments, the 22nd and 34th, were dispatched to the Cape to bolster the Garrison after the other regiments went to Madras. They suffered severely during the voyage and were in a sickly state when they arrived at the Cape. The 34th Regiment for example was “enfeebled ... by disease and unfit, from their tender years, for the fatigues of soldiers...” in 1800. They “seasoned” at the Cape and within two years “a parcel of weakly boys, unable to carry a musquet, became two very fine regiments” and an essential part of the Garrison.⁷¹ The British military authorities thought the fact that the boys became accustomed to a warmer climate and could recuperate in a healthy climate which prepared them much better for service in the East, while they noted that soldiers of the regiments that stayed at the Cape for a while, improved much in “size and strength” during that time. When 2000 troops embarked from the Cape for India, with only a few days notice during the war with Tipu Sahib, they were in a better physical condition than troops despatched from Britain.⁷² These healthy troops provided valuable service in the war, and it convinced Wellesley of the value of the Cape as a “depot from which seasoned troops may suddenly be drawn”.⁷³

Barrow suggested that recruits to be trained at the military depot at the Cape should be between “twelve to fifteen or twenty” to be able to easily adapt to the climate best. He stated that the police in Britain should transfer “all such helpless and indigent youths as might be found guilty of misdemeanours and irregularities approaching to crimes ... engaged destitute and helpless young men in a service where they would have comfortable subsistence and an honourable employment ... instructed ... in those military exercises which form them for immediate service in the regiments of India”.⁷⁴

It was difficult for the maritime empires to project their power across the oceans and large expeditions often experienced difficulties at sea. Conventional wisdom stressed the importance of bases, where forces could replenish and recuperate. Even though Rio de Janeiro (Portuguese settlement) was not too far out of the way for outbound fleets and St Helena Island

⁷⁰ J. Barrow, *Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, I, p.2.

⁷¹ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, pp.157, 165 and 168.

⁷² A.J. Guy, ‘British Strategy and the Cape’ in P.B. Boyden, et al (eds), “*Ashes and Blood*” *The British Army*, I, pp.33-4 and 42n.

⁷³ *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, IV, Mornington (Wellesley) – Yonge, 24/10/1800, p.163.

⁷⁴ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, pp.161-3.

was well located for homeward bound fleets, none possessed the qualities of the Cape, which was “infinitely preferable” to both as it divided the passage more equally and had “better refreshments ... in greater plenty...”⁷⁵

The Cape was also very valuable as a naval base to Britain and was strategically important for merchant shipping, warships and military forces. Troops could recuperate while ships could be repaired and replenished.⁷⁶ It commanded the entrance to both the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, and its geographic position made it possible for easy communication with the wider world. For this reason it was also a very convenient convoy assembly point for the British – even before they conquered it. During the war vital ships with very valuable cargoes, waited at the Cape to be escorted back to Europe by warships.⁷⁷ Its location made it easy to dispatch squadrons or expeditions into the Atlantic Ocean, Indian Ocean, the Red Sea or the East. Sailing ships could be at Madagascar within ten or twelve days, it would take two or three weeks to reach the French islands, to the Red Sea would take five or six weeks, sailing to Brazil required four weeks, and it took seven or eight weeks to sail to India.⁷⁸

Like troops, the crews of naval vessels also had to recuperate at the Cape. Sailors could be maintained with fresh rations, biscuits and wine for a quarter of the cost of dispatching salt provisions and biscuits from Britain. Wine and brandy was also cheaper at the Cape than the West Indian rum. Consumption of the naval squadron at the Cape was substantial: for example during 1797 its approximately 3000 sailors consumed in meat and bread alone more than 1000 metric tons (1360kg per day, about 530 tons of each), and about 600 000 litres of wine.⁷⁹ To this, one should add British warships and troopships on their way to the East and ships of other nations stopping at the Cape. Indeed, quite a market for the agricultural produce of the Cape existed, but more importantly, Britain would have not been able to acquire the same produce with so much ease at any other location along the route.

Despite its attributes, the Cape also had a number of disadvantages as a naval station. Most important was the fact that it had no secure harbour with a wharf, where the refitting, repair or building of ships could take place and no dock that could receive large ships. As an anchorage Table Bay was open to northerly winds in winter, while its bottom consisted of blue slate, which in strong conditions chafed and wore away cables. Closer to Robben Island was a

⁷⁵ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, pp.228-9.

⁷⁶ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Spencer, 10/7/1796, pp.431-2.

⁷⁷ NAUK ADM51/1365, Captains Logs, Journal of HM Sloop *Star*, for the period 26/11/1800 to 20/12/1801.

⁷⁸ BL MS061/1, J. Barrow, *Sketches ...* 4, Military Establishment 1796, p.192.

⁷⁹ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, pp.240-1.

firm sandy bottom, but it was not as protected as in the Bay. Simon's Bay had good firm sand and when northerly conditions prevailed, forty or more ships could anchor in safety. Even when the southeaster blew, at least ten ships could anchor there for the duration of the year "in the most perfect security".⁸⁰ For the Royal Navy, Simon's Town was more secure than Table Bay.

Simon's Town had a range of VOC storehouses, which were well laid out and custom-made. It had "stores of all kinds; forges and workshops for fitting and repairing the timber or iron-work of vessels ...".⁸¹ With sufficient facilities to maintain a navy, it was therefore a valuable base. However, by 1800 it required an upgrade and extensions to properly serve the needs of the Royal Navy and Admiral Curtis thought that as a result of the political uncertainty about the future of the Cape, it was not worth it to invest too much in its improvement.⁸²

The British were astonished that the Cape and not Saldanha Bay, so ideally suited for shipping, became the centre. The Cape "had not a bay, just a roadstead and a dangerous one for shipping," but a very important a supply of water. Saldanha Bay on the other hand, "one of the most noblest harbours in the world" was ideally suited as a port.⁸³ Contrary to both Table Bay and Simon's Bay, it provided protection in both southerly (summer) in northerly (winter) gale conditions, and it had an excellent anchorage for many ships during all seasons: in winter ships could anchor at the Hoedjes Bay to the north, while in summer sufficient anchorage was available in the southern part of the bay. Shipping would always be secure in bad weather. The bay had ample space for careening ships (fine smooth sandy beaches) and it would be easy to create workshops and facilities for maintaining and repairing ships along the shores of the bay.⁸⁴

From a defence point of view Saldanha Bay would be an excellent naval base. It would be easy to fortify due to a relatively narrow entrance and if forts were erected on the three islands in the entrance to the bay, it would "completely defend the entrance of the bay against an enemy's fleet".⁸⁵ A fort with heavy guns on Marcus Island, located at the entrance to the inner bay, would provide good protecting for the anchorage and as the land forms a number of outcrops, it could also be well utilised for defences.⁸⁶ Finally, from a provisioning point of view,

⁸⁰ BL MS061/2, J. Barrow, A general description of the colony of the Cape of Good Hope and of the four districts of which it is composed, 1798; and J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, p.254..

⁸¹ R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, pp.47-9.

⁸² *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, IV, Curtis – Spencer, 12/10/1800, p.207.

⁸³ E.E. Napier, *Excursions in Southern Africa, Including a history of the Cape Colony*, pp.322-3.

⁸⁴ BL MS061/2, J. Barrow, A general description of the colony of the Cape ..., 1798.

⁸⁵ R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, p.29.

⁸⁶ R. Knox-Johnston, *The Cape of Good Hope: A Maritime History*, p.123.

the corn growing Swartland farms were close and as supplies from the interior had to pass via the Roode Sand Kloof (at Tulbagh) it was closer than Cape Town.⁸⁷

So, with such an incredible natural position, why was it not practical to develop Saldanha Bay as the main port? It was notoriously poor in providing two essential resources; wood and water, which rendered “its advantages as a commodious and safe harbour abortive”.⁸⁸ Because of its value to shipping, Barrow suggested that the solution might be in deep wells, a channel from the Berg River to Saldanha Bay, but the easiest would be to create a pipeline from the spring at Witteklip (Vredenburg), “about six miles distant”.⁸⁹ Curtis stated that piping fresh water to Saldanha Bay was only part of the solution. To create a naval base at Saldanha Bay, storehouses and other buildings must be erected, while it would need strong fortifications and an adequate garrison. Part of the defence of Saldanha Bay would be to protect the water and an arsenal in Saldanha Bay should therefore include water reservoirs. Though ideally suited in principle, without fresh water Saldanha Bay could not act as a base, Curtis stated.⁹⁰ Yet, in February 1802, he despatched engineers to Saldanha Bay to investigate its possible naval and military utilisation.⁹¹

5. THE BRITISH MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT AT THE CAPE

The Cape was important for the defence of the British Empire and the British went to much trouble to place its defence on a proper footing, but the cost of it was high. Macartney wrote to Dundas that with “regard to the military expenses of this place, I am truly concerned to find them so high”. He did his utmost not to incur unnecessary defence expenses and warned Dundas that cost of British control would rise, as further “retrenchments were still very desirable”.⁹²

During Yonge’s tenure as Governor, a crisis developed around the issue of his military authority and the responsibilities General Dundas. Civilian governors had to abide to military orders from London, but without specific instructions they could order the local deployment of troops, which the local commander had to obey, if it was not in contradiction with orders from London. Military commanders had to report on the military preparedness and the condition of

⁸⁷ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, p.260.

⁸⁸ R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, p.30.

⁸⁹ BL MS061/2, J. Barrow, A general description of the colony of the Cape ..., 1798.

⁹⁰ *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, IV, Curtis – Spencer, 12/10/1800, pp.207-9.

⁹¹ NAUK ADM50/36, Admirals Journals, Journal of Proceedings Vice-Admiral Sir Roger Curtis Bar t Commander in Chief of his Majesty’s Ships and Vessels at the Cape of Good Hope, 1799-1803, see 25/2/1802.

⁹² M. Boucher and N. Penn (eds), *Britain at the Cape*, Macartney – H. Dundas, 9/3/1798, p.203.

equipment and facilities to both the governor and the military command in London. Governors were not supposed to get involved in regimental duties and discipline matters. Though the Governor was the highest military authority, the parameters were not clearly defined and successful working relationships depended on the rapport between governors and commanders.⁹³

The working relationship between Macartney and General Dundas was good and as Lady Anne Barnard wrote, Lord Macartney “most cautiously avoided small interferences, tho he was for ever in his place when it was necessary, the Head of all”.⁹⁴ Yonge was a different matter. Dundas did not have a high opinion of Yonge, little discussion of military matters took place between the two men and as Yonge interfered in matters that were clearly the prerogative of the military commander, conflict was the logic outcome. Shortly after his arrival, Yonge promoted his aide-de-camp, Major Cockburn, to Lieutenant-Colonel, commended other officers for promotion to the Crown and created a Barracks Department – without consulting General Dundas. Yonge considered the management of barracks a civilian function, while Dundas considered Yonge’s measures a waste of money. In his correspondence with Yonge, he referred to Macartney’s administration as “able, upright and prudent”, which clearly pointed a finger to Yonge’s administration.⁹⁵

Yonge reckoned himself the “Head of the army, as well as of every thing else”, Anne Barnard wrote, while “the general allows him to be only nominally so, and is displeased at him more frequently giving orders respecting the troops”.⁹⁶ Considerable tension existed between the two men, which was exacerbated by the fact that Yonge ordered Brigadier Vandeleur and his cavalry to evacuate their base at Stikland – again without consulting the General. To Dundas this was a breach of military protocol and he reacted harshly by issuing a General Order that no change should be made to the efficient and honest administration of Macartney. All military orders had to be issued through him, he had to be notified of Yonge’s orders and the state of affairs would only change if it was ordered by the Command of the British Army.⁹⁷ This was a direct attack on Yonge’s administration and it was thought that Yonge might either arrest Dundas, or Dundas might force Yonge to leave. Yonge reacted that he did not change the rules of service and that a General Order could not be issued without his prior consent. Routine

⁹³ H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind*, pp.127-9.

⁹⁴ *The Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas*, Barnard – Dundas, 14/5/1800, p.241.

⁹⁵ See the Yonge and F. Dundas correspondence during 1800 in *Records of the Cape Colony*, III, pp.47-8, 122-3, 141-45, 205, 361.

⁹⁶ *The Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas*, Barnard – Dundas, 14/5/1800, p.241.

⁹⁷ *Records of the Cape Colony*, III, F. Dundas – Huskisson, 10/5/1800, pp.129-32.

orders were only to contain routine military information. The General apologised to Yonge.⁹⁸ Henry Dundas was of the opinion that the order General Dundas published, was justified and in accordance with his “duties as to the King's Commission which he holds”, it was to the General's credit that he restrained himself to not “on his part produce something more violent”.⁹⁹

As General Dundas had complained to the Army Command in London about the way in which Yonge interfered in military affairs, Henry Dundas reprimanded Yonge that his military promotions were “utterly inconsistent with His Majesty's Regulations, subversive of the Authority of the Commander-in-Chief, and an improper interference with the duties of the General Officer Commanding at the Cape”.¹⁰⁰ The Army Command requested Henry Dundas to inform Yonge about the limitations of his powers regarding military affairs. He should in future not interfere with military matters that were not his responsibility. Yonge was again told, in no uncertain terms, that he misunderstood his military authority and that such problems must not occur again.¹⁰¹ On 20 April 1801 news arrived that Yonge was recalled. The relationship between the two men was so bad that the General did not wait for a proclamation from Yonge, but immediately issued an order stating that he was the Acting Governor. Vice-Admiral Curtis refused to provide a warship to take Yonge to St Helena Island, and he had to await a berth on a merchant ship.¹⁰² The contrast is obvious: British colonial authorities dealt decisively with Yonge and he was quickly recalled, while the Van de Graaff matter was handled with apprehension.

5.1. Regular British Military Units

Both the Dutch and the British military specialists considered a garrison of roughly 5000 regular soldiers as ideal for the Cape, while the British endeavoured to maintain about 4000 regular troops.¹⁰³ British officers and administrators were in agreement about it and believed that the Cape required “a great force to place it in a state of security”.¹⁰⁴ The difference was that the British managed to maintain it, while the Dutch could not.

⁹⁸ H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind*, p.130.

⁹⁹ *The Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas*, Dundas – Barnard, 11/9/1800, p.247.

¹⁰⁰ *Records of the Cape Colony*, III, War Office – Yonge, 28/4/1800, p.124.

¹⁰¹ *Records of the Cape Colony*, III, War Office – Yonge, 26/9/1800, pp.300-1.

¹⁰² H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind*, p.131.

¹⁰³ See CA BO146, Letter Book, Craig – Dundas, 6/7/1796 and 29/7/1796, pp125-6 and 138-9; *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Craig – Dundas, 30/7/1796, pp.415-7; J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, p.212; and BL MS061/1, J. Barrow, Sketches ... 4, Military Establishment 1796, p.192.

¹⁰⁴ R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, pp.37-8.

After Lucas surrendered, many of the British troops detained at the Cape were shipped out to India. However, some regiments remained at the Cape for a while to keep the Garrison strong and assist with guarding many prisoners. By January 1797 the troop strength were 5043 in total. It included dragoons (863 from the 8th Light Dragoons and the 28th Dragoons), infantrymen (roughly 800 each from the 84th, 86th, 91st, 95th, 98th Regiments and men from the Scotch Brigade) as well as 179 men from the Royal Artillery.¹⁰⁵ The standing Cape Garrison peaked between early 1797 and May 1798 when it consisted of the four infantry regiments as well as two dragoon regiments. At the beginning of 1798 there were roughly 5000 soldiers at the Cape.¹⁰⁶

After Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in May 1798, Britain thought the French might cooperate with Tipu Sahib and threaten the British hold on India. As a rebellion also broke out in Ireland, Britain did not want to dispatch more troops from Britain to India but instead dispatched troops from Portugal, Gibraltar and the Cape. The 28th Light Dragoons, the 84th Regiment and the Scotch Brigade, all under the command of Major General David Baird, left for India at the end of 1798, which substantially weakened the Cape Garrison.¹⁰⁷ The military establishment was further weakened by a devastating fire on 22 November 1798 in the cavalry stables which killed 132 horses, destroyed much of the naval and military stores, warehouses of the EEIC and a number of buildings on the sea front. Two months later another fire devastated the barrack stores. Though General Dundas was convinced it was arson, nothing could be proved.¹⁰⁸

By early 1799 there was probably only between 1500 and 2000 troops at the Cape and it took a while before troop strengths reached 4000 again. By June 1801 it was 4600, but it is uncertain when all the reinforcements arrived.¹⁰⁹ The history of British regiments at the Cape during this time is a long list of the arrival and departure of troops, while many dates are difficult to establish. Table 11 indicate which regiments served at the Cape and for how long.

The 22nd, 34th and 65th Regiments were known as the "boy regiments" or "experimental regiments" since they recruited their ranks to a great extent from the poor-house boys between 12 and 16, while some of the boys were as young as 10 years of age. The purpose with forming

¹⁰⁵ NAUK WO1/178. Memorandum: Projected Expedition from the Cape against South America, 19/1/1797, p.105-7.

¹⁰⁶ H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind*, p.66; and J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, p.174.

¹⁰⁷ G.M. Theal, *History of South Africa since 1795*, I, pp.40-1.

¹⁰⁸ H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind*, p.70.

¹⁰⁹ H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind*, p.69.

these regiments was to relieve the parishes of boys who were allowed to enlist. Each of these regiments was about 1000 strong.¹¹⁰

Due to the vastness of the interior, Craig considered cavalry as very important for the defence of the Cape. Cavalry could deploy quickly, was valuable against an enemy performing amphibious landings and could quickly act against internal threats. Craig saw the local inhabitants as “timid and not likely to attempt anything serious by themselves, particularly against cavalry, of which they are in great dread ... but they must be carefully watched”.¹¹¹ He therefore erected a military post at Stikland, about 20 km from Cape Town on the Cape flats, to “keep check” as it commanded the road into the interior. The barracks and stables at Stikland were sufficient for half a dragoon regiment.¹¹² Brigadier-General (substantive rank Colonel) Thomas Pakenham Vandeleur of the 8th Dragoons was in charge of the cavalry station at Stikland. Anne Barnard thought it a “very barren and cheerless station” as there was little water and vegetation. She questioned the wisdom of having a cavalry station there at all.¹¹³

In Cape Town the British converted the hospital buildings of the VOC into barracks and added additional wings to it. As a result it was an extensive and well built barracks “with great regularity and neatness”.¹¹⁴ It was large enough to house two infantry regiments and one cavalry regiment, while it also contained artillery magazines and grain stores.

Military service at the Cape must have been monotonous at times for the average soldier. Morale of junior officers and troops was not always that good as there was not much to do with a “want of amusement of every kind ... the garrison were much given to drinking & gaming”.¹¹⁵ From time to time officers fought duels and at least two were known to have been fatal: Lieutenant-Colonel Brock of the 81st Regiment was killed in a duel with Captain Menzies of the 22nd Regiment and Lieutenant MacKay of the 91st Regiment was mortally wounded in a duel with Ensign Monteith of the 81st Regiment.¹¹⁶ Inevitably, idleness amongst soldiers often contributed to insubordination or caused efforts to organise a mutiny. On 6 August 1799 a soldier of the 91st Regiment revealed such a plot: soldiers of the 61st and 81st Regiments planned to murder (or “otherwise secure”) their Commanding Officers, seize the powder magazine and the Castle and

¹¹⁰ W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa 1795-1895*, p.17.

¹¹¹ NAUK WO55/1551/10, Memorandum respecting the Defence of the Cape of Good Hope by Lieutenant General Sir James Craig, (undated, properly late 1796).

¹¹² R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, p.194.

¹¹³ *The Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas*, Barnard – Dundas, 28/11/1797, p.96.

¹¹⁴ R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, pp.111-2.

¹¹⁵ *The Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas*, Barnard – Dundas, 10/7/1797, p.42.

¹¹⁶ W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa*, pp.6-23.

wished to make themselves the new masters of the Cape. The ringleaders of the plot were however caught and sentenced to receive a thousand lashes each.¹¹⁷

Table 11: British Military and Naval Units serving ashore at the Cape, 1795 to 1803¹¹⁸

Unit	Service Period	Remarks
Royal Navy Seamen Battalions	1795	Served during the campaign to capture the Cape.
Royal Marines	1795	Served during the campaign to capture the Cape.
EEIC sailors	1795	Volunteers assisted during the attack on Wynberg.
Troops of EEIC	1795	Roughly 400 arrived in August with the <i>Arniston</i> .
19 th Regiment	1796	Five Companies at the Cape during Lucas expedition (arrived just before, en route to the East).
22 nd Regiment (Cheshires)	Between the end of 1799 and May 1800 to 1802	Boy Regiment from poor house boys between 12 and 16. Lost 70 men at sea. Served in Graaff-Reinet, stationed at Rondebosch from May 1801, and at Muizenberg and Simon's Town from Jan 1802.
33 rd Regiment	1796	At the Cape during Lucas expedition (arrived just before with East Indiamen en route to the East).
34 th Regiment	Jan 1799 - Feb 1803	Boy Regiment; went to India from the Cape.
61 st Regiment	1799 to 1801	Deployed in the interior in 1799. Went with Popham to the Red Sea and Egypt.
65 th Regiment (York and Lancaster)	1 Jan 1799 to Feb 1802	Boy Regiment; their ranks were drastically reduced in active service in the West Indies.
78 th Regiment (Seaforth Highlanders)	11 Jun 1795 to Oct 1798	Raised in 1756. The Earl of Seaforth was Commander-in-General. The 2 nd Battalion was first to arrive at the Cape, the 1 st Battalion joined in 1796. Mustered 1150 without officers. Departed to India in Oct 1798.
80 th Regiment	1796	At the Cape during Lucas expedition (arrived just before with East Indiamen en route to the East).
81 st Regiment	1 Jan 1799 to Dec 1802	Many died at sea during the passage. They served in the interior and suffered more casualties than any regiment at the Cape. They were depleted by 1802 as some men were drafted into the 22 nd , 34 th and 65 th .
84 th Regiment	4 Sep 1795 to Nov 1798	2 nd Battalion arrived in 1795. At the Cape during Lucas expedition, went to India for the war against Tipu.
86 th Regiment (Second Battalion of the Royal Irish Rifles)	22 Sep 1795 to 20 Feb 1799	Arrived six days after the Dutch surrender and departed to India on 20 Feb 1799. Well equipped and neat, a 1300 strong regiment – of one of the finest units to serve at Cape.
91 st Regiment (Argyllshire Highlanders)	3 Sep 1795 to Dec 1802 and Mar 1803	Raised by the Duke of Argyll in 1794. Arrived at the Cape on 3 Sep 1795. Participated in the capture of the Cape and also served in the interior. Part left in Dec 1802. Was supposed to embark on 1 Jan 1803, but only left for Britain in Mar 1803.
94 th Regiment		No clear indication of dates.

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The Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas, Barnard – Dundas, 13/9/1799, pp.192-3. Compiled from information in W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa 1795-1895*, pp.6-23. Some dates in Brinton are incorrect. See G.M. Theal, *History of South Africa since 1795*, I, pp.1-98; and *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Craig – Dundas, 30/7/1796, pp.415-7.

95 th Regiment	4 Sep 1795	Participated in the attack on Wynberg and was at the Cape during the Lucas expedition.
98 th Regiment	4 Sep 1795	Participated in attack on Wynberg, was at Cape during the Lucas expedition and served in the interior in 1799.
8 th Light Dragoons (Royal Irish Dragoons)	1796 to Feb 1803	The regiment was formed in 1693 and also served in the interior. King's Royal Irish Dragoons, later Hussars
25 th Light Dragoons	1796	At the Cape during Lucas expedition (arrived just before with East Indiamen en route to the East).
27 th Light Dragoons	1796	At the Cape during Lucas expedition (arrived just before with East Indiamen en route to the East).
28 th Light Dragoons	1796 to end 1798	At the Cape during Lucas expedition; went to India for the war against Tipu.
Royal Artillery	1795 to Mar 1803	A company of artillery arrived in August 1795 with the <i>Arriston</i> , more artillery arrived afterwards.
Royal Engineers	1795 to 1803	The first Royal Engineers arrived with Gen Clarke.

5.2. The Khoi Regiment

Major King was ordered to raise a Khoi unit or a *Hottentot Corps* of 200 to 300 soldiers in February 1796. Recruitment took place at a steady rate. By October 1797 the Corps was under the command of Lieutenant John Campbell, who commanded it for most of the time during the British occupation. It consisted of 7 Sergeants or "Captains", 12 Corporals, 13 drummers and 265 men. Their pay was between four shillings per week for "Captains" and one shilling per week for rank and file. Initially their headquarters was at Wynberg and there were also 94 women and 116 children present, who received half rations and quarter rations per day respectively. At the end of the British period it had 306 men under arms, 130 men that did not serve, 289 women and 237 children in their camp.¹¹⁹ Few desertions took place.¹²⁰

After Lord Macartney took over as governor of the Cape, the Corps was stationed at Hout Bay. Macartney reported to Henry Dundas that the Corps was valuable to the Cape and should be maintained. He remarked that the "Hottentot is capable of a much greater degree of civilisation than is generally imagined, and perhaps converting him into a soldier may be one of the best steps towards it".¹²¹ When Yonge became Governor they were still in Hout Bay, but some of the soldiers were provided with horses and acted as messengers, guides and postal couriers.¹²²

Renshaw, a British artilleryman that arrived at the Cape in June 1796, mentioned the raising of the Khoi regiment at the Cape and stated they were "clothed in scarlet turned up with

¹¹⁹ H. Giliomee, *Die Kaap tydens die Eerste Britse Bewind*, p.56.

¹²⁰ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Craig – H. Dundas, 26/10/1796, p.474.

¹²¹ *Records of the Cape Colony*, II, Macartney – Dundas, 24/2/1799, p.371.

¹²² J. de Villiers, *Hottentot-Regimente aan die Kaap*, pp.99-104.

blue, of which they were wonderfully proud". He was very critical of their soldierly qualities because of the incident in Saldanha Bay when some troops apparently fled after receiving fire from a Dutch frigate and stated: "We found them tractable enough in the exercise, in which they became exceedingly expert; but when put to the test as soldiers, they were cowards beyond description". As a unit the corps " ... shewed a manifest want of courage, yet it will not be denied that some of them possess a good share of individual bravery... generous in affection towards each other, and susceptible of sincere love and strong friendship".¹²³ His description of the corps is a haughty and colonialist-like discussion of the indigenous Cape people and their involvement in a conflict between two European powers for their ancestral land – a conflict not of their making!

In the meantime efforts were afoot to form the Khoi unit into a standing regiment.¹²⁴ In 1800 the Imperial Government decided to transform it into a new and larger regiment. King, now a Lieutenant-Colonel, was in Britain and made important recommendations to the High Command. The issue was discussed for about a year and it was eventually approved on 1 November 1800. The new unit would be commanded by a Lieutenant-Colonel, with one Major, 28 other officers (line as well as staff officers), one sergeant-major, 50 NCO's (including a few staff posts), 16 band members and 456 troops. The only difference between it and a regular British regiment, was that the soldiers would receive 3d a day less than the average British soldier. The new unit, though still referred to as the *Hottentot Corps*, would be called the Cape Regiment and was officially recognised as an Imperial Regiment from 25 June 1801 onwards.¹²⁵ In some sources reference is made to changing the uniforms to blue coats with white and red linings, collars and cuffs, yet no proof of this could be found.¹²⁶

The privates and some of the NCO's in the Cape Regiment were Khoi, while all the commissioned officers and some of the NCO's were British. Soldiers of the regiment were regarded as good marksmen and acted as trackers and guides. Due to their local knowledge they also provided very valuable service to the British military expeditions to the interior. The creation of this unit was one of the variables that helped with quelling the revolutionary fervour in the interior and caused many burghers to submit to British authority. This Corps, though it had different names and its organisation changed, existed in one way or another until it was

¹²³ R. Renshaw, *Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope*, pp.44-5.

¹²⁴ NAUK WO1/769, Grenville – Huskisson, 7/3/1796, p.13.

¹²⁵ J. de Villiers, *Hottentot-Regimente aan die Kaap*, pp.104-8.

¹²⁶ D. Fairbridge, *Lady Ann Barnard at the Cape of Good Hope*, p.114n.

disbanded in 1870. It was the only regular military unit of the rank-and-file that was recruited at the Cape by both the Dutch and the British rulers of the Cape.¹²⁷

5.3. The System of Fortifications

British officers serving at the Cape considered its defences considerable. Renshaw thought the fortifications well planned and stated the Cape was “extremely well defended with numerous artillery, which point in all directions”. Its improvement and maintenance was to a large extent due to “the skill and indefatigable labours of Colonel York” and “in a word, Cape Town is at this time fortified with strength, regularity and judgment”.¹²⁸ But which were these fortifications?

The British did not have a higher regard for the Castle than Thibault and Gilquin. Lieutenant-Colonel Bridges of the Royal Engineers investigated the fortifications of the Cape and wrote a comprehensive report about it in 1798. He stated that the Castle was very important for a force approaching from the east or west, but then the heights under the mountains had to be controlled, as it commanded the Castle. If enemy troops managed to infiltrate the French Lines, fire from the Castle would be devastating when they approached it from behind.¹²⁹ But as Barrow emphasised, despite its substantial defence, the true drawback of the Castle was its location as it was commanded from “the ground rising from it in a slope to the Devil’s Hill, which, therefore, renders it not defensible”.¹³⁰ Percival reported that the barracks inside the Castle was sufficient to house an infantry regiment, it had a “handsome” mess for officers, quarters for all the principle officers and though the Governor had apartments there, he seldom used it. All the Public Offices of the Government were lodged in the Castle, all important documents and papers were kept there and the affairs of state were conducted from it.¹³¹ It was a true *Citadel* of power.

The British were concerned about the approaches to Cape Town from the east and the north. In Craig’s opinion the slope of Devil’s Peak was of pertinent military value as it was the high ground from which the town could be commanded. Any force in possession of Cape Town would find it impossible to maintain its hold on the town without also controlling the slopes of

¹²⁷ V.C. Malherbe, ‘The Khoekhoe Soldier at the Cape of Good Hope’ in *Military History Journal*, 12 (3) 2002, p.97.

¹²⁸ R. Renshaw, *Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope*, pp.31-2.

¹²⁹ NAUK WO55/1551/10, Report on the Cape of Good Hope by Lieut. Colonel Bridges, Royal Engineers, 1798.

¹³⁰ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, pp.206-7.

¹³¹ R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, pp.107-8.

Devil's Peak.¹³² Control of the high ground was very important for artillery positions in the days of direct fire and even positions of strength could be commanded from high ground. The French Lines was important, but did not reach high enough, was mainly of temporary earthen construction and had to be improved upon.¹³³

Craig therefore commenced with erecting permanent blockhouses on the slopes of Devil's Peak (the temporary redoubts were replaced) and deemed a garrison of about 1200 men necessary to man it in wartime.¹³⁴ From these positions the force guarding it had to "keep such a cross and concentrated fire, as to prevent any moderate number of troops from attempting to force the lines in their approach to the town from Simon's Bay".¹³⁵ In ascending order the *Prince of Wales' Blockhouse*, the *York Blockhouse* and then the prominent *King's Blockhouse* were added along the slope of Devil's Peak. The *York*, however, was initially incorrectly positioned, it was re-sited, rebuilt and was called the *Queen's Blockhouse*.¹³⁶ In 1797 the 24-pounders at the *Imhoff Battery* were moved to the *King's*, *Queen's* and *Prince of Wales* blockhouses and the 18-pounders to the *Craig Battery*.¹³⁷

Though an amphibious landing eastwards of the Salt River was deemed possible, the river mouth formed a lake that was only fordable at certain places. The *Craig Battery* and *Tower* covered the landing place and the passage through the river, while it also posed a severe menace to boats as ships of the line that could not approach too close (about 1500 metres) due to the shallowness of the water and the swell (see Chapter 9).¹³⁸ The blockhouses and batteries Craig ordered (at Devil's Peak and the Salt River mouth) were the principal new batteries the British erected.¹³⁹

Bridges judged the combined firepower of the *Chavonnes* and *Amsterdam* batteries as sufficient to prevent a hostile fleet from taking control of the anchorage.¹⁴⁰ These batteries, together with the *Roggebaay Battery* and the two small batteries at Mouille Point and Three Anchor Bay, commanded the western side of the bay and its entrance, as with prevailing southerly winds, ships entering the bay had to keep the *Mouille Battery* close to the board.¹⁴¹

¹³² NAUK WO1/324, Craig – H. Dundas, 27/12/1795, pp.900 and 902.

¹³³ BL MS061/1, J. Barrow, Sketches ... 4, Military Establishment, 1796, pp.209-10.

¹³⁴ NAUK WO1/324, Craig – H. Dundas, 27/12/1795, pp.900 and 902.

¹³⁵ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, pp.206-7.

¹³⁶ B. Johnson Barker, *The Castle of Good Hope*, p.52.

¹³⁷ G. de Vries and J. Hall, *The Muzzle Loading Cannon of South Africa*, p.22.

¹³⁸ NAUK WO55/1551/10, Report on the defence matters by Commodore Blankett, 1796.

¹³⁹ R. Renshaw, *Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope*, pp.31-2.

¹⁴⁰ NAUK WO55/1551/10, Report on the Cape of Good Hope by Lieut. Colonel Bridges, 1798.

¹⁴¹ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, p.208.

The British also improved the fortifications of Camps Bay, Simon's Town, Muizenberg and Hout Bay. Bridges considered the battery erected in Camps Bay as sufficient to protect its beach against a landing.¹⁴² The existing battery and breastworks in Muizenberg were improved and by 1799, another three fortifications were added to the defences of Muizenberg.¹⁴³ Muizenberg always had a garrison and the batteries in False Bay were kept in good repair by the British. They certainly applied the lessons pertaining to the poor Dutch defence of the Cape. In the defence of Hout Bay the British focussed on the *East Fort* and created an expensive blockhouse above it. Guns and equipment were moved to the *East Fort* and by 1797 the *West Fort* was abandoned while the *East Fort* had a battery with five 18-pounders on circular platforms.¹⁴⁴ Despite its many shortcomings, the fixed defences were in essence a formidable defensive system. A potential attacker would therefore be well advised not to tackle it directly.

6. DEFENCE OF THE CAPE COLONY: OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

If the Cape was in Dutch or French hands, Barrow argued, it would have posed a serious problem to Britain. France, assisted by Spain from Rio de la Plata could have interrupted British trade and attacked the Portuguese at Rio de Janeiro. This "would have furnished the most effectual means of endangering the security of [British] Indian trade and settlements". Furthermore, if they dispatched a fleet to the Indian Ocean and if the French had supported Tipu Sahib with only a mediocre force, things would have been very difficult for the British in India. British control of the Cape so early in the war, "completely excluded every hostile power from the Indian Seas, threw so great an increase of commerce into our [British] hands by that exclusion, left us such quiet and undisturbed dominion in the eastern world, and gave us so many solid advantages unexampled in any former war ...".¹⁴⁵ For the defence of India, the Cape was crucial – in fact in Barrow's view, it ensured British commercial superiority.

After the failed Lucas expedition and the Battle of Camperdown (1797), it was generally thought that little possibility for a Dutch attack on the Cape existed. General Dundas still deemed a French attack possible. He worried that French revolutionary forces might arrive at the Cape and "with their revolutionary system" free the slaves, arm the poor and disaffected, and

¹⁴² NAUK WO55/1551/10, Report on the Cape of Good Hope by Lieut. Colonel Bridges, 1798.

¹⁴³ U.A. Seemann, *Fortifications of the Cape Peninsula*, pp.73-81.

¹⁴⁴ CA VC81, Craig – Dundas, 14/4/1796; and CA A33/1, Abstract of works performed on Fortifications, Hout Bay, 19/10/1797.

¹⁴⁵ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, p.184 and 186-8.

then “a big force might arise from a small force”.¹⁴⁶ Dundas probably had the events in the West Indies in 1791 and the later slave uprisings in mind, which were inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution. British concern with possible French support to the disaffected inhabitants of the Eastern Cape is therefore understandable. Yet, how did they plan to defend the Cape and which threats and opportunities existed?

Even though the navy was the first line of defence, due consideration was always given to the landward defence of the Cape. Before Craig left the Cape, he wrote a memorandum on its defence and the value of the defensive works erected under his direction.¹⁴⁷ Other commanders, engineering officers like Bridges and colonial administrators like Barrow also analysed the defence of the Cape. General Dundas had a clear grasp of the function of a land force in defence against maritime power projection. He explained to Henry Dundas if all failed (blockades and at sea) and an enemy still landed, it is his (the Army’s) responsibility to attack the enemy at their first landing “at almost any risk or any odds”, as this was the crucial phase. If he was unable to defeat them then, he would “endeavour to retard their progress into the country, the prevention of which I consider as indispensably necessary”.¹⁴⁸

Craig examined the various directions from which an enemy could attack and besides Table Bay (and Camps Bay) there were three other points; False Bay, Hout Bay and Saldanha Bay. Table Bay was well defended and as Cape Town was the centre of gravity, it had to be taken before any conquest could be successful.¹⁴⁹ The batteries in Table Bay were also important because it provided security to shipping and an inferior fleet could hide under the cover of the batteries. Bridges was quite convinced that Table Bay was secure from attack and stated: “The batteries for the defence of Table Bay are so numerous and powerful that a landing within their reach could never be thought of”.¹⁵⁰ The only place an amphibious landing in Table Bay could take place, was to the north of the Salt River mouth, but due to the lake an attacking force had to march inland first. The terrain was very sandy and with the usual ammunition and equipment progress would be very difficult, while siege equipment could not be brought along without draught animals. If the defenders had cavalry, such an attack would be very difficult.¹⁵¹

Though Camps Bay had a sandy beach, its continuous rolling surf would make landings difficult. Bridges thought its battery would be able to destroy boats attempting to land, since the

¹⁴⁶ BL MS052/9, F. Dundas – H. Dundas, 3/3/1798.

¹⁴⁷ NAUK WO55/1551/10, Memorandum respecting the Defence of the Cape Craig, c 1796.

¹⁴⁸ BL MS052/9, F. Dundas – H. Dundas, 3/3/1798.

¹⁴⁹ NAUK WO55/1551/10, Memorandum respecting the Defence of the Cape Craig, c 1796.

¹⁵⁰ NAUK WO55/1551/10, Report on the Cape of Good Hope by Lieut. Colonel Bridges, 1798.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

rocky coastline prevented warships from approaching close enough to provide gunfire support. Theoretically it was possible for troops to land at Green Point during an uncommon calm day, capture the batteries from behind and take the town from the back. But this would be a very precarious venture.¹⁵² Craig maintained if a force did land and placed artillery on Lion's Rump, it posed a very serious threat to the Cape as they would be able to control the Castle and the batteries at the western side of the bay. Craig suggested that the British authorities create a citadel and a military complex on Lion's Rump. This position, he argued, was so commanding as it totally controlled the town and its fortifications, it would be easy to defend and difficult to capture, while it would make the Cape as "defensible as possible".¹⁵³ The British authorities were not prepared to undertake such an expensive project.

For protection of the anchorage and the entrance to the bay, the small *Roggebaay Battery* was not of much significance, whereas the Castle was too far to cause much damage to ships and they could anchor at such a distance (three to four miles) that they would not be in much danger. With the *Amsterdam* and *Chavonnes* batteries it was a different matter. The strength of the *Amsterdam Battery* and its ability to hold out against a ship of the line, seemed to have been a point of much deliberation amongst British officers and administrators – some argued that it would have been possible to silence it, while others disagreed. Percival referred to the *Amsterdam* and the *Chavonnes* batteries as two "very strong batteries", and the *Chavonnes* was "capable of greatly annoying ships standing into the bay, immediately on their rounding of Green Point". The *Amsterdam Battery* was a formidable casemate battery. It had a rampart around it, magazines and storehouses, was bombproof, could hold at least 200 troops in its barracks and was well defended on the land-side also.¹⁵⁴ Barrow also considered the *Amsterdam* a strong battery, stating there were few places "where so great a fire can be concentrated, as can be brought to bear on the anchoring ground of Table Bay from ... batteries ... with a considerable number of heavy guns".¹⁵⁵ However, some of the guns were old and rusted.

These two batteries, "very terrific in their appearance" rendered it "a hazardous business for ships to attempt an entrance into the Bay". Nonetheless Percival and Barrow agreed with certain naval officers that if the *Chavonnes* was mastered, and ships of the line drew up abreast of the *Amsterdam*, it would not be able to hold out for long – Percival added "especially when attacked with the ardour and spirit I have witnessed in our [British] brave seamen". So, this

¹⁵² NAUK WO55/1551/10, Report on the Cape of Good Hope by Lieut. Colonel Bridges, 1798.

¹⁵³ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, pp.209-10.

¹⁵⁴ R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, pp.103 and 105.

scenario then required troops to land at Green Point, attack from the land and successfully overrun the *Chavonnes Battery* – a difficult undertaking with a few “ifs”. The dangers were that Green Point had many shoals and only a small sandy beach while a small battery, *Kijk in de Pot*, and some guns defended the shoreline. The wind for such an attack should ideally be westerly or west-north-west, while the usual wind (and severe conditions) would make such an attack difficult. This left a small window of opportunity as such conditions were rare. Furthermore, ships could not anchor in front of the *Chavonnes Battery*, which added to its defence as it would be more difficult to bombard the battery from ships tacking around the bay or trying to hold station for a while. Percival therefore warned that it would be misleading and “an error” to see these “obstacles” as “trifling”.¹⁵⁶ If an attacker wanted to by-pass the *Amsterdam* and keep a safe distance from it, it would have to anchor at least three or four miles from it – difficult from the weather point of view. All these difficulties only enhanced the strength of the defence. Bridges did not agree with the idea to even attack the batteries at all, and was convinced that to reduce them with warships would not be worth it, as after such a contest the warships “would most probably be ... so injured as to be unfit for further service in these turbulent seas ...”.¹⁵⁷

Why were coastal fortifications so formidable? Certainly ships of the line carried more artillery (between 64 and 100 guns with 32-pounders on the lower gun decks) and with well-exercised crews able to maintain a high volume of fire, they were formidable opponents even to great fortifications. It was however not necessary a clear-cut scenario. The value of a stable platform should not be underestimated. Ships were effected by the swell, they either had to sail or anchor and use springs to turn them in such a positions that they could bring their broadsides to bear. In a fortification with guns in casemates, there would be no wood splinters flying around, no mast, spars and rigging being shot to pieces and very important, the danger of red-hot-shot igniting fires would not be a factor. A ship of the line was about 60 metres long, while the *Amsterdam Battery* had a much longer front, and guns could fire at various angles at ships because of its half-moon shape. Furthermore on coastal artillery, artillerists would have worked out bearings and ranges precisely and would have established the ideal elevations for their guns to deliver accurate fire. These were typical advantages fortifications had over ships, but very important, it required proficient artillerists to man fortifications.

The height, size and steepness of Table Mountain provided a secure flank to the Cape Town over which an assault could not take place. However, Bridges saw Devils Peak as a

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J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, p.215.

¹⁵⁶

J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, p.215; and R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, pp.105-7.

commanding position and the lines between *Fort Knokke* and Devil's Peak as crucial for the defence of the Cape. The stone towers erected on the slopes of Devil's Peak were vital for the protection of the position and to prevent it from being flanked. The terrain around the towers itself was steep and very rocky, making it difficult to assault the towers. If an enemy approached the lines, it would be engulfed by fire from the heights and these positions were "entirely out of danger of being carried by any sudden and vigorous attack of an enemy if defended with resolution and judgement".¹⁵⁸

Percival considered Muizenberg as an important position as it could cut off the southern peninsula from Cape Town. He compared it to "the ancient Thermopylae of Greece"; stating an enemy marching from "Simon's Town to the Cape would here find an almost insurmountable obstacle to his progress".¹⁵⁹ This position was therefore strengthened. Two contemporary British military assessments (Renshaw and Percival) used the word "impregnable" to describe the improved defences at Muizenberg. Renshaw stressed the importance of the narrow pass "at the foot of Muisenbergh", stating that "a few riflemen placed here might stop the progress of an army".¹⁶⁰ Percival pointed out that this strongpoint was specifically secure against an attack from the Simon's Town side. Nature also added to the defence as the pass around the mountain at Muizenberg was narrow (between the mountain and the sea) with heavy surf and rocks to the south of Muizenberg. Attacking Muizenberg from the sea would be dangerous as warships could not come too close inshore, due to the rocks and shoals, while the large surf on the sandy beach made amphibious landings impossible. An attack from Muizenberg, Percival insisted, would now have little chance of success.¹⁶¹

Wynberg was a place to quarter troops and a communication post, not a base that had defensive value. It had only a few field pieces and no batteries or fortifications. It would be possible to defend this location, as it was surrounded by broken ground, but an attacker could then just avoid it, cut it off, and advance around it.¹⁶²

Barrow explained that from a defensive point of view, the "greatest objection" against Simon's Bay was that it was a lee port to Table Bay in the winter when shipping used it. In wartime it implied "a most serious inconvenience, as it might happen that a fleet of enemy's ships could have time to disembark troops and land stores and ammunition at any of the

¹⁵⁷ NAUK WO55/1551/10, Report on the Cape of Good Hope by Lieut. Colonel Bridges, 1798.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, p.63.

¹⁶⁰ R. Renshaw, *Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope*, p.32.

¹⁶¹ R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, pp.64 and 70.

¹⁶² R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, p.100.

windward bays without a possibility of the fleet in Simon's Bay beating up to windward to throw any impediment in their way".¹⁶³ If the Cape was threatened along its Atlantic coast in winter (with prevailing northerly winds), warships from Simon's Bay would have to sail around Cape Point and tack upwind to Cape Town or the other bays. In case of a surprise attack on the Cape, an enemy would be able to approach the coast, disembark troops and equipment before being impeded upon by a naval force from Simon's Town.¹⁶⁴

To attack and march a force across the Cape would be a difficult undertaking due to the harsh nature and lacking infrastructure. This would be even more difficult if the force was poorly equipped, had no draught animals and faced tough resistance. To march troops across the Cape in winter, was difficult by itself as Captain Percival experienced when British regiments marched from Cape Town to Simon's Town in August 1796 to embark for the East. By the time they reached Wynberg, Percival grumbled, they were "very much fatigued" after a "dreadfully wet day, and been able to procure hardly anything to eat ... we found nothing but wet rushes to lie on ... obliged to sleep in our drenched clothes". On reaching Simon's Town they were glad to embark and get a warm meal "after a fast of nearly three days, and a fatiguing march through heavy sands".¹⁶⁵ If it was so difficult to move an infantry force between Cape Town and Simon's Town with the poor roads and infrastructure, the problems an attacker faced would compound. Yet, in 1795 the British coped with these hindrances, while they had no wagons or draught animals, they pulled their own guns and experienced a shortage of provisions.

The British thought that the VOC signal system was old and outdated. They did not maintain the signal post on Lion's Head, but retained the one on Lion's Rump. It had a gun and a flag post for conveying messages between the Castle and ships. The British used an extensive secret code with flags that had specific numerical value.¹⁶⁶

As a result of the *La Preneuse* affair (a French frigate sailed into Algoa Bay and engaged British ships at anchor) General Dundas had a small defensive work erected to defend the landing place and a blockhouse surrounded by a palisade for the protection of the men stationed there, and as a deterrent against rebellious burghers. Barrow also believed that an enemy landing there and supplying weapons to the local population might cause "mischief ... not to be calculated..."¹⁶⁷ *Fort Frederick* was erected in Algoa Bay during the second half of 1799 and

¹⁶³ BL MS061/2, J. Barrow, A general description of the colony of the Cape ..., 1798.

¹⁶⁴ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, p.259.

¹⁶⁵ R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, pp.38.

¹⁶⁶ CA BO180, Proclamations, Craig, 28/3/1797, pp.90-1.

¹⁶⁷ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, p.87.

had a garrison consisting of infantrymen and some of the 8th Dragoons.¹⁶⁸ Troops destined for the frontier was often sent to Algoa Bay by ship, disembarked there and could then be deployed from the military base in the bay.¹⁶⁹

An attacking force would have difficulties to support itself after amphibious landings, except at Mossel Bay or Algoa Bay. This was too far from the Cape to conduct a campaign and the only way to harm the Cape would be to incite the local Khoi or Xhosa to rebellion, or to cut off Graaff Reinet, which would deny the Cape much of its meat supply. Barrow thought Saldanha Bay, Gordon's Bay and Blaauwberg were alternative landing sites, but a force landing there would have to prevent the Cape from being supplied from the interior to be successful.¹⁷⁰

Craig described Saldanha Bay as an excellent bay and as it had no defence, nothing prevented an enemy from taking possession of it and securing its anchorage against an attack. However, a force conducting operations from Saldanha Bay to Cape Town would face "insuperable difficulties": the road was very sandy and heavy, in summer water was very scarce and the population density was low. Though an invader would face little resistance, moving ammunition and supplies with troops fatigued after a long voyage, would be very difficult. In addition an attack on Cape Town would require artillery, which would not be possible to transport without draught animals.¹⁷¹

Despite these difficulties, Craig stated such a contingency should not be negated in the military planning and a constant watch of the bay was necessary to warn the Cape if an enemy was present. The first thing the defenders would have to do is to drive off all the cattle and animals from the farms in the area with a small cavalry force (20 and 30 horsemen) stationed in the vicinity. This could easily be done as there were not more than half a dozen farms within 30 kilometres. A strong cavalry force, at least two regiments, then had to cut the communication between an enemy and the inhabitants. The size of the infantry force deployed to the north of Cape Town, would depend on the strength of the enemy and the seriousness of the situation. Craig warned it must be done with caution as an infantry force would not be able to return to the Cape in under four days, while with fair winds a fleet could sail from Saldanha Bay to Table Bay in a number of hours. Defending infantry could then be cut off, if an enemy land in Table Bay.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ *Records of the Cape Colony*, II, F. Dundas – Yonge, 24/2/1800, pp.61-4; and W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa*, p.17.

¹⁶⁹ W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa*, p.18.

¹⁷⁰ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, p.213-4.

¹⁷¹ NAUK WO55/1551/10, Memorandum respecting the Defence of the Cape Craig, c 1796.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

A scenario Craig warned about was that an enemy could land instigators along the coast and raise the population in revolt. Provisions from the interior could then be barred from reaching Cape Town. Such a situation had to be prevented and due to the vastness of the interior cavalry was essential, as cavalry could act in any direction and “cut up” small enemy detachments.

7. MARITIME SECURITY AND THE ROYAL NAVY AT THE CAPE

7.1. The Naval Situation and the Royal Navy Organisation at the Cape

From a general discussion on the strategic value of the Cape, its value as a base and its defence, the focus will now move to the naval situation, the Royal Navy at the Cape and the operations it conducted. The role of the Royal Navy must not be seen in isolation, as it was one component of an integrated defensive approach. Within the British paradigm of the time, however, it was a very important component. So, what was the general naval situation at the time? Also, with the Cape being used as a naval base and the Royal Navy conducting operations from it, what did they actually achieve?

In the first four years after 1795, the Dutch naval establishment was decimated. Besides its capture by the French in 1795 and the Lucas fiasco, two other events further disseminated the little semblance to a sea-going navy that remained. The first was the Battle of Camperdown (Kamperduin) on 11 October 1797. France wanted to create a combined navy in co-operation with the Batavian Republic with the purpose of invading Ireland and the Dutch thought they could regain some of their lost prestige by participating, or perhaps even gaining a naval victory.¹⁷³ As they first had to engage the British, the Dutch naval commander, Admiral De Winter, was very pessimistic about the whole venture. He was nevertheless ordered to sail from Texel, and the British immediately took up the bait. Battle with a British fleet under Admiral Duncan was joined just outside Den Helder, close to Kamperduin.¹⁷⁴ Though the fleets were essentially equal in numbers; the British ships were larger and more heavily armed. The British had the advantage of the wind, they bore down on the Dutch and passed through their line in an effort to prevent a retreat to the Dutch coast. In the tradition of British-Dutch battles, the battle was hard-fought with the fleets engaging broadsides for hours. In the end with his flagship, *De*

¹⁷³ Schama, S., *Patriots and liberators. Revolution in the Netherlands, 1780-1813*, p.281.

¹⁷⁴ G.A. Geerts, *Samenwerking en Confrontatie. De Frans-Nederlandse militaire betrekkingen voornamelijk in de Franse tijd*, p.55.

Vrijheid, dismasted and surrounded by five British vessels, De Winter surrendered. The Dutch lost nine ships of the line.¹⁷⁵

The second event occurred in 1799, when a British force (with Russian assistance) invaded the Batavian Republic under the command of the Duke of York. Since April 1799 the Royal Navy blockaded the Dutch coast. Lord Duncan, with 22 warships, escorted the 30 000 British troops of General Abercromby across, while the Russian detachment under General Hermann consisted of only 1400 men. Amphibious landings took place on 27 August along the coast of North Holland and the naval base at Den Helder fell into British hands on 28 August. The entire Dutch fleet (eight ships of the line and three frigates) as well as 16 merchantmen surrendered. Heavy fighting took place in North Holland, and after some initial gains the British-Russian forces were forced to retreat. An armistice was signed on 18 October and by the end of November all Anglo-Russian troops, except those taken prisoner, departed.¹⁷⁶

The large number of newly promoted and inexperienced officers in senior command positions, the unhealthy tension in the Navy and the breakdown of discipline, confirmed Milo's assumption that the failures of the Batavian Navy were also to be found outside the service, in national and international politics.¹⁷⁷ These two devastating defeats at the hand of Royal Navy nonetheless spelled the end of the "Dutch naval power as a significant force in global politics".¹⁷⁸ Operations in the south Atlantic and Indian Oceans were therefore anathema. In concurrence with the norm during these wars, British success on the European continent against a well organised army was rare, but British naval triumphs abounded.

The war at sea was at least in Britain's favour. British naval shipbuilding programme expanded between 1795 and 1800, the operational navy increased in size, a convoy system was introduced, French Atlantic ports were blockaded and Britain had dealt with her naval enemies. Enemy shipping captured amounted to 200 000 tons by 1800, while by 1802 Britain held 75 000 enemy sailors as prisoners of war.¹⁷⁹ The British Royal Navy therefore achieved much success in eliminating its enemy at sea, as the naval statistics of the period indicated (see Table 12).

¹⁷⁵ Schama, S., *Patriots and liberators. Revolution in the Netherlands, 1780-1813*, p.282; and A.T. Mahan, *Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire*, p.378.

¹⁷⁶ G.A. Geerts, *Samenwerking en Confrontatie. De Frans-Nederlandse militaire betrekkingen voornamelijk in de Franse tijd*, pp.51-3.

¹⁷⁷ T.H. Milo, *De geheime onderhandelingen tusschen de Bataafsche en Fransche Republieken van 1795 tot 1797*, p.iv.

¹⁷⁸ J.I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, p.1124.

¹⁷⁹ R. Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare*, pp.270-1.

Table 12: The Balance of Naval Forces, 1796, 1800 and 1805¹⁸⁰

	Britain			France and Allies		
	1796	1800	1805	1796	1800	1805
Ships of the Line	123	127	136	160	126	96
Frigates	160	158	160	144	90	71
Total	283	285	296	304	216	167

Navies provided security in two ways; by clearing the seas of enemy vessels and by providing secure passage to friendly ships, also in hostile waters. Through her naval presence at the Cape, Britain aimed at clearing the southern oceans from enemy vessels to make it secure for British commerce and British forces moving to and from the East. Not only did they protect own trade in this way, but they ensured that their enemy did not have free passage across the oceans, which also made an attack on British territory from the sea virtually impossible.

The Cape of Good Hope's value to Britain was determined by the value of India - the more valuable India, the more important the Cape. As Macartney stated, the "political, naval and military advantages" of the Cape, were striking to the British.¹⁸¹ Naval officers agreed. Elphinstone was convinced of the Cape's value as a naval station, but emphasised to the Admiralty that its security depended on a fleet. By late 1797 the Cape squadron therefore consisted of eighteen ships, including seven ships of the line.¹⁸² Admiral Curtis understood the duties of the Cape squadron very well, stating it had to "watch the motions of the enemy at Mauritius, as well as to be a check on the Privateers there fitted out for the annoyance of the Indian Trade; and since the disturbances which took place upon the East Coast of this Colony, it is also expedient to ... have an eye on that part of the Settlement, for it has appeared ... the discontents drew the attention of the French".¹⁸³ Furthermore, he also had to be ready for unexpected contingencies, patrol the South Atlantic, assist British forces in India and do as much damage as possible to the enemy's trade. Quite a task, yet during the last few years of the British period the squadron was also weaker due to the many commitments of the Royal Navy. Ships of the Cape squadron constantly cruised and at one stage only one ship was left at the Cape.

During these very critical years (1796-1801) Earl Spencer was the First Lord of the Admiralty Board. Spencer, often described as an arrogant but "genial and courteous" aristocrat,

¹⁸⁰ See the statistics in R. Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare*, p.270.

¹⁸¹ *Records of the Cape Colony*, II, Macartney – H. Dundas, 10/7/1797, p.114.

¹⁸² C.J. de Villiers, *Die Britse Vloot aan die Kaap*, pp.45 and 112.

¹⁸³ *Records of the Cape Colony*, III, Curtis – Nepean, 4/1/1800, pp.12-15.

took up the reigns of the Admiralty tightly. Even though he was a non-seaman that did not always understand naval matters as he should, it is evident from his correspondence that he quickly learned and was serious about the business of the Navy.¹⁸⁴ Spencer had good support though. The Royal Navy officer corps of the time could justly be considered as one of the most successful military castes in the history of warfare. They were a capable and professional group that was not only responsible for the Royal Navy winning most of its battles, often against the odds, but to a great extent these capable officers also made British naval mastery possible.

Hence, who were the commanders of the naval establishment at the Cape? The relations between Craig and Blankett were strained during Elphinstone's absence and Dundas suggested to Spencer that he appoint "a good-tempered as well as an able admiral" to the Cape.¹⁸⁵ Spencer immediately replied that Rear-Admiral Thomas Pringle, Admiral Duncan's Second-in-Command in the North Sea, will go to the Cape and take over as Commanding Officer when Elphinstone returned as he thought "Pringle will do well there, as it does not require any very brilliant abilities, and he is likely to draw very well in conjunction with the other services".¹⁸⁶

Pringle took over command of the squadron at the Cape on 7 October 1796, when Elphinstone returned to England, and stayed at the Cape until January 1798. Pringle had no favourable idea of the Cape as a naval base. He constantly complained about the problems the navy faced with regards to supplies, equipment for repair and maintenance, the difficulties of communication and the damage to the ships due to the frequent gales.¹⁸⁷ He told Anne Barnard that "it was the worst nautical situation of a country that it was possible for the Devil himself to contrive, fewer possibilities of Harbours & Landing places than it was possible to conceive". Pringle was "a growler with his tongue", Anne Barnard maintained, but "honest and liberal in his conduct".¹⁸⁸

Pringle did not agree with plans to develop the Cape and considered the idea to establish a local manufacturing industry foolish. Its only use was to provide provisions to ships on long voyages. In fact, it was not just the lack of provisions and naval supplies, the weather, the difficult communications and so on, that irritated Pringle; he disliked the place. In a letter to Elphinstone, he expressed his disenchantment with the Cape, exclaiming; "This part of the world

¹⁸⁴ L. Gardiner, *The British Admiralty*, pp.188 and 192; and N.A.M. Rodger, *The Admiralty*, p.82.

¹⁸⁵ *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, I, H. Dundas – Spencer, 24/3/1796, pp.240-1.

¹⁸⁶ *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, I, Spencer – H. Dundas, 26/3/1796, pp.242-3.

¹⁸⁷ BL MS376/2, Pringle – Elphinstone, 2/8/1796; and MS376/3, Pringle – Elphinstone, 18/8/1796.

¹⁸⁸ *The Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas*, Barnard – Dundas, 10/7/1797, and September 1798, pp.41 and 175.

produces nothing new, at least nothing pleasant ... Cape Town ... I must go there sometimes or the Service will go to hell where I presume the Scoundrel is that discovered this cursed place".¹⁸⁹ This was Spencer's "good-tempered admiral"! However, Pringle's opinion seemed to have softened and he did not "dislike the Cape so much since he fell in love with a pretty little Miss ...", whom he nearly married. When he had to return to England, there were "other motives" as Lady Ann Barnard gossiped that "may detain him a little Almighty love may have its share ...".¹⁹⁰

Pringle's successor, Rear-Admiral Sir Hugh Christian, arrived at the Cape on 28 January 1798 and took over on 10 March, when Pringle eventually departed.¹⁹¹ By all accounts he was a capable officer and Anne Barnard stated Christian was "a mild, firm intelligent man and a pleasing companion".¹⁹² By November he was very ill and advised to take some rest in the interior, but he refused as his "zeal and anxiety for public service was paramount to every other consideration ...".¹⁹³ Christian was set to depart with *HMS Stately* that had to convoy ships to Britain, but he died on 23 November 1798.

After Christian's death, Spencer appointed Vice-Admiral Sir Roger Curtis as Commander-in-Chief at the Cape on 26 February 1799.¹⁹⁴ Curtis was Captain of the Fleet (Chief of Staff) under Lord Howe at the famous Battle of the 1st of June, but when Howe wanted to pursue the fleeing enemy, Curtis thought he should not give the enemy an opportunity to "turn the tables" on them. Mahan therefore considered him too timid,¹⁹⁵ but he was at the stage one of the prominent admirals in the fleet and Mahan also stated that he was a "distinguished and gallant officer".¹⁹⁶ In the meantime Captain George Losack, who was the senior Captain in the squadron, acted as Commodore.¹⁹⁷ Curtis eventually arrived at Table Bay on 9 December 1799.¹⁹⁸ As usual Lady Ann Barnard was quick to comment, writing only a few days later, "Sir Roger seems to be a clever pleasant man, & I hear he is an excellent officer".¹⁹⁹ Curtis was a capable officer and a good commander, always aware of the strategic environment. He kept his superiors well informed about the naval situation at the Cape and also cooperated with

¹⁸⁹ BL MS376/6, Pringle – Elphinstone, 3/5/1797.

¹⁹⁰ The *Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas*, Barnard – Dundas, 16/08/1797 and 3/2/1798, pp.61 and 101.

¹⁹¹ *Records of the Cape Colony*, II, Macartney – Dundas, 30/1/1798 and 9/3/1798, pp. 231 and 244.

¹⁹² The *Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas*, Barnard – Dundas, 3/2/1798, p.101.

¹⁹³ *Records of the Cape Colony*, II, Losack – Nepean, 30/11/1798, pp.300-1.

¹⁹⁴ *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, I, Spencer – Curtis, 26/02/1799, p.191.

¹⁹⁵ A.T. Mahan, *Types of Naval Officers drawn from the History of the British Navy*, p.250.

¹⁹⁶ A.T. Mahan, *Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire*, I, p.148.

¹⁹⁷ *Records of the Cape Colony*, II, Losack – Nepean, 30/11/1798, pp.300-1.

¹⁹⁸ NAUK ADM50/36, Journal of Proceedings ... Sir Roger Curtis ..., see 9/12/1799.

¹⁹⁹ The *Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas*, Barnard – Dundas, 14/12/1799, p.213.

Wellesley and Rainier in India whenever possible.²⁰⁰ Curtis was at the Cape when it was returned to the Batavian Republic in February 1803.

The Cape weather and sea conditions around southern Africa had a severe effect on the active ships that the Royal Navy pushed so hard at the Cape station. Damage to masts, broken rigging and spars, leaks and other problems, ships that worked hard experienced, were constant. The records indicate that many ships returning from patrols often required urgent repairs. Most of the repairs were done in Table Bay or in Simon's Bay, but if it was work to the hull, or the ship had to be caulked, Saldanha Bay was normally the location.

Table Bay was open to the north and Bridges wrote that the north-westerly winds blowing in winter caused such a swell in Table Bay that "the best anchors and cables cannot resist".²⁰¹ During a terrible unseasonable north-westerly storm on 5 November 1799, ships dragged their anchors and cables gave way, despite all efforts. The first adrift was *HMS Sceptre* (64), Captain Edwards, which struck a rock at about 20:00. She quickly broke up since she was old and her timbers were not so sound anymore.²⁰² At least 300 men (she had a crew of 423), the Captain, his son and many of the officers perished. Next the *Oldenburg* (74), a Danish ship of the line, was blown ashore, but she stranded intact on soft sand and her crew was saved.²⁰³ Later an American ship and several other vessels shared the same fate. Renshaw stated though the North Sea was "subject to frightful tempests, they are not as near so dreadful as the storms that are experienced here".²⁰⁴

Captains and admirals often complained about the strong winds and gales at the Cape. In his very complete journal and neat hand, Captain Osborn of the *Tremendous* regularly whinged of ships' boats breaking loose, rigging and parts of his masts, specifically topgallant masts, collapsed and they often had to be repaired at sea. On 9 April 1799, while *Tremendous* and *L'Oiseau* were chasing a strange sail, *Tremendous* lost part of her rigging. In October 1800 while on patrols in the South Atlantic, they hit bad weather which again damaged the ship.²⁰⁵

Admiral Curtis' journal is also a good record. After returning from a patrol the *L'Oiseau* was in very bad state. She was found unfit for active service on 15 December 1799 and therefore had to make a summer passage back to Britain for decommissioning. After the sloop

²⁰⁰ H.W. Richmond, *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, IV, pp.159-62.

²⁰¹ NAUK WO55/1551/10, Report on the Cape of Good Hope by Lieut. Colonel Bridges, 1798.

²⁰² NAUK ADM50/36, Journal of Proceedings ... Sir Roger Curtis ..., see 5/111799.

²⁰³ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, p.257.

²⁰⁴ R. Renshaw, *Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope, the Indian Ocean and up the Red Sea, with Travels into Egypt, through the Desert, etc*, pp.39-40.

²⁰⁵ See the many records and complaints in the Journals of Captain John Osborn of the *Tremendous* in NAUK ADM51/1357 and ADM51/1365, from November 1798 to November 1800.

Hope was found unfit for further service on 21 February 1800, she was decommissioned and dismantled.²⁰⁶ In September 1800 the *Jupiter* had a serious leak (taking in 9 cm water per hour) and she had to be heaved down to repair the leak. The *Tremendous* was in a poor state, her copper was much worn and she became very leaky as she had not been out of the water for eleven years! On 2 October 1801 she was despatched to Bombay to go into the dry dock for a refit. *Tremendous* returned to Simon's Bay from Bombay on 3 June 1802, but sixty of her men went to hospital and she had a further 80 sick onboard.²⁰⁷ No doubt, despite bad sea conditions, the men must have been glad to be back in the healthier climate of the Cape.

Notwithstanding their gruelling service and the constant repairs the naval squadron required, Admiral Curtis inspected his ships on 10 December 1801 and found them in "order in all respects".²⁰⁸ The *Star* and the *Adamant* returned to Britain late in 1801. By April 1802 the Royal Navy squadron in Simon's Bay was much depleted (compared to earlier) and consisted of eight warships, the *Lancaster*, *Jupiter*, *Diomedé*, *Imprerieuse*, *Braave*, *Rattlesnake*, *Penguin*, *Euphorosyne*, and the supply ship *Hindostan*. Soon afterwards the *Imprerieuse* returned to Britain, the *Euphorosyne* was disarmed and sold, but the *Tremendous* was back on station.²⁰⁹

Wear and tear on ships, rigging and sails due to severe weather was not only considerable, but also expensive. As Pringle stated, a weeklong south-easterly gale could cost the Navy a thousand pounds. Curtis complained to Spencer about the gales being frequent throughout the year, lasting longer than around Britain in winter, while "these gales are accompanied with very heavy seas".²¹⁰ The violent weather around the Cape and the danger of the bay was a large disadvantage and as a result the "navy have felt this inconvenience very much whilst on this station".²¹¹

7.2. The Operational Responsibilities of the Royal Navy at the Cape

British warships stationed at the Cape performed constant operational service. After capturing the Cape they supported Admiral Rainier in India and then they had to eliminate a naval threat – the Lucas expedition. For the rest, they were involved in supporting the Royal Navy in the

²⁰⁶ NAUK ADM50/36, Journal of Proceedings ... Sir Roger Curtis ..., see 15/12/1799 and 21/2/1800.

²⁰⁷ NAUK ADM50/36, Journal of Proceedings ... Sir Roger Curtis ..., see 1/9/1800, 2/10/1801 and 3/6/1802.

²⁰⁸ NAUK ADM50/36, Journal of Proceedings ... Sir Roger Curtis ..., see 10/12/1801.

²⁰⁹ G.M. Theal, *History of South Africa since 1795*, I, p.96; and NAUK ADM50/36, Journal of Proceedings ... Sir Roger Curtis ..., see 10/4/1802.

²¹⁰ *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, IV, Curtis – Spencer, 12/10/1800, p.209.

²¹¹ R. Percival, *An account of the Cape of Good Hope*, p.124.

Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, they perpetually patrolled the Indian Ocean, the coast of southern Africa and even operated along the coast of South America. In addition they escorted homeward-bound ships from India and China to Britain, while warships that had to return to Britain often sailed with a convoy East Indiamen.²¹² During this period they also succeeded in capturing and destroying a substantial number of enemy ships.

Britain considered capture at sea as an essential weapon in her armoury, as it was possible to damage her opponent severely by attacking and limiting or even stopping his trade. The British knew from experience in previous wars that besides economic damage and loss, it also deprived an enemy of transport and troopships and of competent seamen. Theorists like Richmond emphasised that the capture of enemy ships at sea in war, was part of defence and stated: "Capture of shipping is ... a definite measure of defence against oversea invasion. No invasion oversea can take place if there be insufficient vehicles of transport-ships".²¹³ Mahan added that it is the "overbearing power" one state might have, that drove an enemy from the sea and gave the stronger navy the opportunity to control commerce and the sea.²¹⁴ With this the Royal Navy was particularly successful and they altogether brought 56 captured ships back to the Cape, while they destroyed a number of ships in the war at sea.

Ships stationed at the Cape essentially included all the types of warships in the service of the navy. A few ships of the line were usually present (as a rule they were two-decked 74's and 64's and not three-decked first raters) as well as fourth raters, frigates and a few smaller vessels. Frigates performed a different role from the heavier ships of the line. Though many were attached to the great battle fleets, most of them usually performed tasks such as patrols and escort duties, while they operated in pairs or alone. Much of the work frigates performed was due to the beleaguered British economy, as Sir Charles Middleton stated in 1793, the French conducted "a war against trade", while the British had to protect a large number of merchantmen, a role for which frigates were ideal.²¹⁵ At the Cape station some of the naval responsibilities (specifically scouting and patrolling duties), were performed by frigates and sloops, but due to the sea conditions in the southern oceans, most of the ships used for these duties were frigates and 50-gunned ships (so called fourth raters), or even ships of the line.²¹⁶

²¹² The *HMS Trident* for example returned to Portsmouth with a convoy East Indiamen from India and China in 1799; *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, IV, Rainier – Spencer, 30/7/1799, p.197.

²¹³ H.W. Richmond, *Imperial Defence and Capture at Sea in War*, pp.144, 205 and 214.

²¹⁴ J. Baylis et al, *Strategy in the Contemporary World. An Introduction to Strategic Studies*, p.117.

²¹⁵ T. Wareham, *The Star Captains. Frigate Command in the Napoleonic Wars*, p.10.

²¹⁶ Three masted warships were divided into six rates or classes, depending on their size and armament. The first to third-raters were the ships of the line (from 64 to more than 100 guns on two or three gundecks), a fourth-rater was armed with 50-56 guns, a fifth-raters was a frigate

7.2.1. Operations along the Coast of Southern Africa

The *t'Haasje* incident indicated to the British authorities that it was necessary for the Royal Navy to closely watch the coast, as an enemy landing in the Frontier region and the supply of weapons to the local population, could create a problem to British authority.²¹⁷ Warships therefore conducted regular patrols and were often engaged, specifically from 1799 onwards, in transporting troops and supplies to Algoa Bay.²¹⁸ Two interesting ship-to-ship actions between ships of the Royal Navy and French naval vessels also took place in South African waters.

Due to Napoleon's Egyptian campaign, Commodore Blankett (promoted Rear-Admiral in February 1799) was despatched from Britain to the Red Sea with a squadron. Spencer ordered Blankett, if Napoleon went "down the Red Sea... or the Euphrates" he had "to establish some stumbling-block in his way".²¹⁹ From the British point of view, the defence of India obviously started at sea, and in the worldwide war it included using the Royal Navy to block French power projection wherever necessary. Blankett's squadron, the *HMS Leopard*, *HMS Daedalus* and *HMS Orestes*, left Portsmouth on 9 July 1798 and rounded the Cape on 1 October.²²⁰ In Arabian waters the ships soon experienced a shortage of salt provisions (salted meat, etc) and spirits (mostly brandy and wine), which they were "not likely" to procure there. In January Blankett despatched the *HMS Daedalus* (32) under the command of Captain Lidgbird Ball to the Cape for supplies.²²¹ This again illustrated the value of the Cape from a victualling point of view to the British Navy – even during operations in Arabian waters and along the East Coast of Africa, the Cape was the best replenishment station.

At daybreak on Friday 8 February 1799, at 31:48S and 31:35E, the lookout on *Daedalus* reported two strange sails west-north-west. One of the vessels looked like a frigate and at around 08:00, when the *Daedalus* was about six miles from the ships, the two ships separated and the frigate stood northwest. Captain Ball immediately pursued the frigate: with all sails set

(armed with 24-40 guns) and a sixth-rater was a sloop usually armed with less than 20 guns. See A.B.C. Whipple, *Fighting Sail*, p.14.

²¹⁷ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, p.87.

²¹⁸ *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, IV, Curtis – Spencer, 10/10/1800, pp.232-7.

²¹⁹ *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, IV, Spencer – Blankett, 4/7/1798, p.178.

²²⁰ NAUK ADM51/1427, Journal of the Proceedings of *HMS Daedalus*, Captain Henry Lidgbird Ball, for the period 4/2/1798 and 20/5/1799.

²²¹ *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, IV, Blankett – Spencer, 16/1/1799, p.190.

in a fresh breeze and with a following sea, the *Daedalus* started to gain slowly on the strange frigate. As the frigate showed no colours, Ball ordered his ship to clear for action.²²²

The chase went on for the rest of the day and through the moonlit night. At 12:05 the next day, the frigate hoisted French colours and fired her stern chasers at the *Daedalus*. *Daedalus* replied with her bow guns and at 12:15 (position 33.07S and 30.05E, about 220 miles east of the Umzimvubu river mouth), the Frenchmen shortened sail, hove-to on the larboard tack and fired her broadside. At 12:40, with the two ships “within pistol shot distance” of each other the French frigate was “keeping up a heavy fire”, while *Daedalus* came under her lee and fired a number of full broadsides into her. The mizzen mast of the French frigate then went by the board and her fire slackened. At 13:20 “she hailed that they had struck, her colours being shot away”.²²³ Men from *Daedalus* immediately boarded her and learned that she was the French frigate *La Prudente* (36) of about 800 tons, based in Mauritius with a crew of 318 under the command of Captain Emmanuel Hippolite Le Joliff.²²⁴ The ship which sailed away was an American ship *La Prudente* had captured. *La Prudente* had 32 men killed and 40 wounded, while on the *Daedalus* nine were killed and seventeen wounded (two more died shortly afterwards of their wounds).²²⁵ The relatively high casualties indicated the severity of the contest.

Ironically, *Daedalus* had a complement of 215 men (when mustered five days earlier)²²⁶ and her crew was probably much fatigued after seven months of operational service. As a result, with a much smaller crew, they might have met their match if Captain Le Jolliffe decided to board *Daedalus* and let the crews fight it out, instead of fighting a ship-to-ship action against the crack gunnery of the Royal Navy. The hull and rigging of *La Prudente* obtained much damage during the battle. After affecting some repairs at sea they made way for the Cape and arrived at Table Bay on 15 February 1799. Carpenters immediately commenced with repair

²²² NAUK ADM52/3603, Logbook of *HMS Daedalus*, Captain Henry Lidgbird Ball, Esq, Stephan Stead, Master, for the period 7/7/1798 to 7/7/1799, see 8/2/1799; and ADM51/1427, Journal of the Proceedings of *HMS Daedalus*, Captain Henry Lidgbird Ball, for the period 4/2/1798 to 20/5/1799, see 8/2/1799.

²²³ NAUK ADM52/3603, Logbook of *HMS Daedalus*, Captain Henry Lidgbird Ball, Esq, Stephan Stead, Master, for the period 7/7/1798 to 7/7/1799, see 9/2/1799.

²²⁴ NAUK HCA49/7(3), Prize Papers of the ship *La Prudente*, Emmanuel Hippolite le Joliff, Commander, French property, captured by *HMS Daedalus*, Henry Lidgbird Ball, Commanding, 1799.

²²⁵ NAUK ADM52/3603, Logbook of *HMS Daedalus*, Captain Henry Lidgbird Ball, Esq, Stephan Stead, Master, for the period 7/7/1798 to 7/7/1799, see 9/2/1799.

²²⁶ NAUK ADM36/15257, *Daedalus* Muster Book, for the period 1/11/1797 to 28/2/1799, see 4/2/1799.

work to both ships.²²⁷ The British records indicated *La Prudente* had 32 slaves onboard. These men were brought ashore on 5 and 6 March to be sold.²²⁸ As the French officially freed the slaves at Mauritius during the 1790's, they were probably free men that were sold into slavery again.

Theal, and subsequent historians, stated *La Prudente* was ostensibly on her way to Algoa Bay with volunteers on board, to assist the local insurgents. This is not certain and evidence might suggest (she had a ship she captured in company) that she was on a privateering voyage. Nonetheless, jubilation at the Cape was high, as another thorn in the flesh of the British in the Indian Ocean was removed.

Daedalus again joined Blankett's squadron. One of the crewmembers of *La Prudente*, Seamen Tring, was executed on the *HMS Suffolk* on 21 January 1800. He was a crewmember of the *HMS Centurion*, but fell into French hands, when they re-captured a ship the British had previously captured. He then volunteered to serve on *La Prudente* and after capture he maintained that he was American. Tring's former shipmates recognised him and he was court-martialled and convicted.²²⁹ Not much escaped the net of the Royal Navy in the Indian Ocean!

With the turbulent situation on the Frontier between 1799 and 1802 naval vessels were often despatched to Algoa Bay with provisions, troops, weapons and ammunitions. At the same time they also had to perform patrols on the East Coast.²³⁰ At dusk on Friday 20 September 1799 the *Rattlesnake* (16), the armed supply ship *Camel* and the schooner *Surprise* at anchor in Algoa Bay, saw a strange sail with Danish colours approaching the bay. Captain Gooch of the *Rattlesnake* and Captain Lee of the *Camel* were ashore and could not return due to the heavy swell, but Lieutenant William Fothergill ordered the *Rattlesnake* and *Camel* to prepare for action. As the visitor entered the bay, *Rattlesnake* fired at her. She turned out to be the French frigate *La Preneuse* (40) under the command of Captain L'Hermitte. Shortly afterwards the frigate anchored (at about 21:30) and the ships engaged.²³¹ The British "kept up a smart fire" as they suspected the French might want to board their ships. The French initially directed their fire at *Camel* whose fire later slackened and fell silent. By midnight the *Camel* was badly damaged and started to take water, *La Preneuse* then directed her broadsides at the *Rattlesnake* who

²²⁷ NAUK ADM52/3603, Logbook of *HMS Daedalus*, Captain Henry Lidgbird Ball, Esq, Stephan Stead, Master, for the period 7/7/1798 to 7/7/1799, see 15/2/1799.

²²⁸ NAUK HCA49/7(3), Prize Papers of *La Prudente*, Emmanuel Hippolite le Joliff, Commander, French property, captured by *HMS Daedalus*, Henry Lidgbird Ball, Commanding, 1799.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ NAUK ADM50/36, Journal of Proceedings ... Sir Roger Curtis ..., 1799-1803.

²³¹ ADM51/1298, Captain's Logs, Journal of the Proceedings on board His Majesty's Sloop *Rattlesnake*, Samuel Gooch, Commander, for the period 1/2/1799 to 1/12/1799, see 20/9/1799.

gallantly fought on, despite damage. However, at about 2:30 *La Preneuse* surprisingly broke off the action, slipped her cable and “sailed before the wind”.²³² Both British ships were badly damaged, specifically in their masts and rigging and Gooch wrote: “Had a lot of damage and the carpenter had to stop the shot holes immediately”.²³³ Yet, casualties were light on the *Rattlesnake* as they had only two killed and two wounded. Though it could not be stated with certainty, Barrow pointed out that *La Preneuse* was probably the only French warship that ventured into any of the bays along the coast of the Cape.²³⁴

Commodore Losack immediately despatched two Royal Navy bloodhounds, *Jupiter* and *L'Oiseau* to search for *La Preneuse*.²³⁵ The *Jupiter*, under command of Captain Granger, caught up with *La Preneuse* (about hundred miles east of the current East London) in gale force conditions on 10 October and engaged her in a running battle that lasted from 21:00 until 14:00 the next day. In an action, for which Granger was much criticised, the *Jupiter* could not open her lower gun ports in the rough sea and *La Preneuse* managed to damage the rigging of the more powerful *Jupiter* and escaped. The hunt continued. *L'Oiseau* searched in vain and returned on 12 December from her patrol.²³⁶

After the battle with *La Preneuse*, the *Camel* urgently had to go to Saldanha Bay to fix the damage and shot holes in her hull. She returned on 18 December 1799. As the *Rattlesnake* also obtained battle damage, Pringle ordered her to Saldanha Bay by the end of January 1800.²³⁷ She spent most of February 1800 there, was heaved down, repaired and her hull was re-coppered.²³⁸

The involvement of the Navy off the Eastern Cape continued. On 24 January 1800 Losack was ordered to take the *Jupiter* and the *Star* for a four month patrol to Algoa Bay, where he had to “act to the best of judgements for his majesty’s service”, but if the situation does not necessitates their presence at Algoa Bay, Losack had “cruise off the Mauritius ...”²³⁹ The *Rattlesnake* was despatched to Algoa Bay on 4 February 1801 to bring troops back to the Cape.

²³² J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, pp.86-7.

²³³ ADM51/1298, Captain’s Logs, Journal of the Proceedings on board His Majesty’s Sloop *Rattlesnake*, Samuel Gooch, Commander, for the period 1/2/1799 to 1/12/1799, see 20/9/1799.

²³⁴ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, p.86

²³⁵ *Records of the Cape Colony*, II, Losack – Nepean, 14/10/1799, pp.498-9.

²³⁶ NAUK ADM50/36, Journal of Proceedings ... Sir Roger Curtis ..., 12/12/1799. See also C.J. de Villiers, *Die Britse Vloot aan die Kaap*, pp.204-6.

²³⁷ NAUK ADM50/36, Journal of Proceedings ... Sir Roger Curtis ..., see 12/12/1799, 18/12/1799 and 20/1/1800.

²³⁸ BL MS053, R. Curtis, Holograph Journal, 1799 – 1802, Process of heaving down his majesty’s Sloop *Rattlesnake* in Saldanha Bay, February 1800. This insightful journal provides detail on heaving down, caulking, cleaning, repairing, re-floating and re-rigging a warship in Saldanha Bay.

²³⁹ NAUK ADM50/36, Journal of Proceedings ... Sir Roger Curtis ..., see 24/1/1800.

On 26 October 1801, due to “disturbances” on the Frontier, *Diomedé* was urgently despatched to Algoa Bay with 100 troops as the quickest way to get them there was by sea. On 5 May 1802 the *Braave* and *Penguin* were despatched to Algoa Bay with troops.²⁴⁰

In October 1800 Curtis informed Spencer about the security of the Cape and the volatile situation in the frontier region, stating he feared “the smallest spark of fire being thrown there would set everything in a flame”. This situation, he reported, have meant that it was not possible for him to keep a squadron to blockade Mauritius and restrain privateers as was necessary since he had to use the Navy to “prevent the enemy from fomenting disturbances” on the Frontier. He therefore asked for more ships as patrolling the Cape, the South Atlantic to South America and the Indian Ocean to Mauritius, was a large operational area.²⁴¹ However, the operational responsibilities of the navy were vast, and Curtis’ squadron was not reinforced.

7.2.2. Operations in and around the Indian Ocean

With Britain, French and Dutch interests well established in the Indian Ocean, the Cape squadron assisted the squadron in Madras, and undertook many operations in the Indian Ocean. Ships of the Cape squadron were involved in convoy duty in the Indian Ocean, which implied taking convoys to the East and returning to the Cape with convoys. Ships escorting British ships to India often became involved in operations in the East before returning.²⁴² It is against the French islands and French trade, that most operations were however conducted. French privateers operating from the French Indian Ocean Islands did considerable damage to the British shipping; specifically after the arrival of De Sercey’s four frigates in June 1796 as his orders were to do as much damage as possible to the British trade and not to seek engagements with the Royal Navy. Nonetheless, on 14 July 1796 six of his frigates were involved in an indecisive naval action with two British ships of the line (74’s) off Sumatra and both sides withdrew after an intensive engagement.²⁴³

In October Elphinstone received intelligence that the French had seven large frigates and an armed schooner at Mauritius. The frigates were *La Forte* (46), *La Vertu* (40), *La Régénérée*

²⁴⁰ NAUK ADM50/36, Journal of Proceedings ... Sir Roger Curtis ..., see 4/2/1801, 10/10/1801 and 5/5/1802.

²⁴¹ *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, IV, Curtis – Spencer, 10/10/1800, pp.232-7.

²⁴² NAUK ADM50/65, Proceedings of the Squadron under the Command of Thomas Pringle Esq, Rear Admiral of the Red, for the period 24/8/1795 to 19/5/1798; and M. Phillips (ed), *Ships of the Old Navy. A History of the Sailing Ships of the Royal Navy, HMS Centurion (50)*, <http://www.cronab.demon.co.uk/C2.HTM> (accessed in June 2005).

²⁴³ C.J. de Villiers, *Die Britse Vloot aan die Kaap*, p.141.

(44), *Le Seine* (44), *Le Cybille* (44), *La Prudente* (40) and *La Preneuse* (40).²⁴⁴ Yet, two years later De Sercey's squadron was effectively no more: two ships went to Batavia and later returned to France, while two others escorted Spanish treasure ships back to Europe. One of the frigates, *La Prudente*, became a privateer while *La Preneuse* (under the command of the zealous Captain L'Hermitte) was an annoyance to the British and did much damage to their Indian Ocean trade. The Cape squadron maintained cruisers around Mauritius to seek out and destroy French privateers. Curtis' orders to Captain Brine of the *Hope* in December 1799 are very telling: "do your utmost endeavour to take or destroy such of the Enemy's Vessels as you might find in Port or at Sea".²⁴⁵

The logbooks of ships, naval reports and letters from officers on patrol around Mauritius is often an exiting tale of action, ships captured, cutting-out expeditions and even fire exchanged with coastal batteries. In chasing French ships, Royal Navy vessels often went right into Port Louis until they were forced by fire from the batteries to withdraw. Indian Ocean patrols often resulted in warships returning to the Cape with a string of prizes. Though the incidents are too many to list here, some examples could be mentioned.

One of the first "cutting-out expeditions" was performed by the crew of the *L'Oiseau* under the command of Captain Linzee, described as "a spirited little fellow".²⁴⁶ One night in March 1797 her ships' boats captured two fully laden brigs from under the noses of Reunion's coastal batteries. Captains Hotham and Larcom (*Adamant* and *Lancaster*) missed the opportunity of capturing a Hamburg merchantman, *Sea Nymph*, at Mauritius in September 1800, as she just made it into Port Louis and they were forced to turn around by the coastal batteries. That evening (12 September) they send three boats on a cutting-out expedition to capture a ship from under the gun batteries. Much gun fire and small arms firing took place and at 23:00 "the boats returned with the ship, but with the loss of two men killed and several wounded". A few days later they again chased a schooner, which turned out to be a privateer.²⁴⁷ Their cruise was a huge success, as they at one stage managed to capture six ships in eleven days!²⁴⁸

During April and May 1799 the *Tremendous*, *Jupiter*, *Adamant*, *L'Oiseau* and *Star* were on patrol around Mauritius. On 10 May Captain Brabant of the *L'Oiseau* took his ship into Port Louis and exchanged fire with two French ships at anchor and with the coastal batteries, while

²⁴⁴ *The Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Spranger, 4/10/1796, p.467. The number of guns the French frigates carried differs in various sources and one can assume guns were taken of, or replaced.

²⁴⁵ Order Book of Captain Brine quoted in C.J. de Villiers, *Die Britse Vloot aan die Kaap*, p.132n.

²⁴⁶ *The Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas*, Barnard – Dundas, 13/08/1798, p.171.

²⁴⁷ NAUK ADM51/1357, Journal of HMS *Adamant*, Captain ... Hotham, for the period 22/2/1800 to 21/5/1801, see specifically 11, 12 and 20/9/1800.

the *Jupiter* also entered the bay, exchanged fire with the batteries and forced a small ship ashore. British boats immediately boarded the vessel and she turned out to be an American ship from Bengal that French privateers had captured. The British salvaged her rich cargo and sailed back to the Cape with three captured ships in company.²⁴⁹ By the middle of 1800 various ships were engaged in searching for a French squadron apparently on its way to Mauritius while in July four ships (*Adamant*, *Lancaster*, *Rattlesnake* and *Euphrosyne*) went on a Mauritius patrol.²⁵⁰ They only returned to the Cape late in November with a number of captured ships.²⁵¹

Ships from the Cape squadron hunted the elusive frigate *La Preneuse* for a long time. At one stage the *Jupiter* and *L'Oiseau* chased her and a corvette right into Port Louis, but they were forced to turn around by heavy fire from the coastal batteries.²⁵² Eventually the Royal Navy had their revenge. On Wednesday 11 December 1799, when the *Tremendous* (74), Captain Osborn, and the *Adamant* (50), Captain Hotham, were on patrol south off Mauritius, they spotted a strange sail.²⁵³ It was *La Preneuse* under command of Captain L'Hermitte. He knew his frigate was no match for a ship of the line and a fourth rater, decided to run and turned northeast towards Mauritius. The British ships gave chase, "making all available sail".²⁵⁴ During the next day the British ships gained somewhat on the frigate, exchanging some fire. L'Hermitte could not make Port Louis and he beached his frigate about three miles from Port Louis, close to a coastal battery. The British ships maintained a heavy fire at the frigate, while also receiving fire from the batteries. By 16:30 L'Hermitte ordered his ship's masts to be cut away. At about 20:00 *La Preneuse* eventually struck her colours. British fire immediately ceased, they put their boats in the water, boarded *La Preneuse* and took prisoners. As they had to prevent the French from repairing her, she had to be destroyed and was set alight at 21:30. She blew up soon afterwards.²⁵⁵

The *Adamant* and *Tremendous* arrived back from Mauritius with the news of *La Preneuse* on 1 February 1800. Though their masts and rigging were in a bad condition and they

²⁴⁸ C.J. de Villiers, *Die Britse Vloot aan die Kaap*, pp.154-7.

²⁴⁹ NAUK ADM51/1357, Journal of ... *Tremendous*, Captain John Osborn; and ADM51/1309, *Adamant*, Captain ... Hotham, see specifically May 1799.

²⁵⁰ BL MS053, R. Curtis, Holograph Journal, 1799 – 1802, Narrative of a cruise off the Isle of France, 9/8/1800 to 4/10/1800, pp.45-52.

²⁵¹ NAUK ADM50/36, Journal of Proceedings ... Sir Roger Curtis ..., see 7/7/1800 and 21/11/1800.

²⁵² C.J. de Villiers, *Die Britse Vloot aan die Kaap*, pp.198-9.

²⁵³ ADM51/1365, Journal of ... *Tremendous*, Captain John Osborn Commander, see 11/12/1799.

²⁵⁴ NAUK ADM52/2623, Masters Logs, Journal of the Proceedings of HM Ship *Adamant*, 11/12/1799; and ADM51/1309, *Adamant*, Captain ... Hotham, see 12/12/1799.

²⁵⁵ NAUK ADM51/1365, Journal of ... *Tremendous*, Captain John Osborn, see 12/12/1799. Also *Records of the Cape Colony*, III, Osborne – Curtis, 3/2/1800, p.33.

needed repairs, they also brought back three captured prizes.²⁵⁶ "The blowing up of *La Preneuse*" in the words of Andrew Barnard "puts a finishing stroke to the French Marine in these seas...".²⁵⁷ The British achieved another success by eliminating one of the great scourges of British trade, the privateer Captain Surcouf from Mauritius, when Blankett's flagship, *HMS Leopard*, captured *Le Clarissa* on 30 August 1800. Blankett (now a Rear-Admiral) served to the end and died on 14 July 1801 onboard his flagship in the Red Sea.²⁵⁸

The Cape directly and indirectly also supported a number of operations in the Indian Ocean. In August 1800 the *Daedalus*, the *Braave* (from the Cape squadron) and two other warships blockaded Batavia, captured five armed vessels and destroyed 22 merchantmen.²⁵⁹ When Sir Home Popham was despatched to the Red Sea in 1801, he received military and naval assistance at the Cape. However, Curtis recorded on their arrival at the Cape, his men were in "a very sickly condition; fever on passage ... many died".²⁶⁰

Because of its value to the French, Mauritius was always an important target. Before Lucas arrived at the Cape, Elphinstone and Craig contemplated attacking Mauritius with large force they had available.²⁶¹ However, when they received intelligence that Lucas had not yet rounded the Cape, the expedition was cancelled and it could be said that Lucas actually saved Mauritius, "no mean achievement, although not exactly what he had set out to do".²⁶² Mauritius remained a menace. In March 1800 Yonge told Dundas that the only "annoyance at present at the Cape and indeed to India, is Mauritius".²⁶³ Marquis Wellesley felt much stronger about it and at the time he devised a scheme to invade Mauritius. He asked assistance from the Cape. No troops were available and Curtis as well as Rainier (in the East) indicated that they did not support the idea due to their limited resources and the extensive duties their ships had to perform. Wellesley insisted.²⁶⁴ Despite the pressing duties his squadron had to perform and the fact that he had very few ships available, Curtis despatched the *Diomedé* and *Imperieuse* on 6

²⁵⁶ NAUK ADM50/36, Journal of Proceedings ... Sir Roger Curtis ..., see 1/2/1800.

²⁵⁷ *The Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas*, Andrew Barnard – Dundas, 9/3/1800, p.236.

²⁵⁸ M. Phillips (ed), *Ships of the Old Navy. A History of the Sailing Ships of the Royal Navy, HMS Leopard (50)*, <http://www.cronab.demon.co.uk/L.HTM> (accessed in July 2005); and L. Stephen (ed), *Dictionary of National Biography*, V, p.205.

²⁵⁹ M. Phillips (ed), *Ships of the Old Navy. A History of the Sailing Ships of the Royal Navy, HMS Centurion (50)*, <http://www.cronab.demon.co.uk/C2.HTM> (accessed in June 2005).

²⁶⁰ NAUK ADM50/36, Journal of Proceedings ... Sir Roger Curtis ..., see specifically 12 and 26/2/1801.

²⁶¹ *Records of the Cape Colony*, I, Craig – Dundas, 30/7/1796, p.415.

²⁶² C.N. Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas*, p.88.

²⁶³ *Records of the Cape Colony*, III, Yonge – H. Dundas, 29/3/1800, pp.94-100.

²⁶⁴ *Records of the Cape Colony*, III, Mornington (Wellesley) – Curtis 26/1/1801 and Mornington (Wellesley) – Yonge, 1/3/1800, pp.410-5 and 435-6.

April 1801 to cruise off Rodriguez in support of a possible expedition against Mauritius.²⁶⁵ To his great frustration, Curtis was notified in May that the whole expedition was cancelled.

7.2.3. Operations in the Atlantic Ocean

With protection of trade as one of the most important functions of the Royal Navy, convoy duties were a common part of the active duty of naval vessels, specifically in the Atlantic. The British *Cruiser and Convoy Act* of 1708 established a convoy system for the protection of trade. After war broke out, convoys were immediately organised and by 1793, merchantmen could be heavily fined if they strayed from their convoys. Britain saw all seamen as part of its naval strength and as a result every merchantman captured diminished the military strength of Britain. As French privateers caused copious losses, in the revised *Convoy Act* of 1798 Britain made it compulsory for merchantmen in vital trade to participate in convoys.²⁶⁶ Big, well-armed East Indiamen were not forced to participate in convoys according to the law, yet they generally participated in it, as it limited the risk of capture. Ships of the Cape squadron constantly performed convoy duty and often escorted British merchantmen to India or Europe. Warships returning to Britain often sailed with a convoy of East Indiamen, via St Helena Island, to Britain.²⁶⁷

Spain (a major colonial power in the Americas) declared war on Britain in October 1796. This caused the British much anxiety as sailing vessels en route to the East passed close to the coast of South America, and Spanish ships operating from that coast posed a threat to British shipping. The British also considered a Franco-Spanish expedition from South America to the Cape a possibility. Consequently the War Office contemplated sending an expedition from the Cape against the Spanish at Rio de la Plata early in 1797. The proposed expedition had to consist of two infantry battalions (1600 men), 180 cavalymen and 60 artillerymen from the Cape Garrison (1840 men) as well as an additional 500 men from Botany Bay (Australia). To prevent the expedition from unnecessary depleting the force at the Cape, an additional 94 artillerists had to be pulled in from India, while another 1000 troops had to be dispatched to the Cape from Britain, which would still leave 4297 men to guard the Cape. The Admiralty had to provide the

²⁶⁵ NAUK ADM50/36, Journal of Proceedings ... Sir Roger Curtis ..., see 6/4/1801.

²⁶⁶ A.T. Mahan, *Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire*, II, p.205.

²⁶⁷ The *Trident* and the *Star* that returned with East Indiamen from India and China in 1799 and 1801 are just two examples. Many others exist. See NAUK ADM51/1365, Captains Logs, Journal of HM Sloop *Star*, 26/11/1800 – 20/12/1801; and *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, IV, Rainier – Spencer, 30/7/1799, p.197.

warships and supply vessels to ferry the force across.²⁶⁸ The expedition never took place, but the way in which it was planned provides good insight into the global war Britain fought and the broad strategic outlook of British decision-makers.

Admiral Pringle also considered a possible Spanish attempt on the Cape from Rio de la Plata as a reality. He despatched *L'Oiseau* in March 1797 to patrol "off the Rio de la Plata", to gain intelligence and attack Spanish trade. He notified the Admiralty that he will as far as possible "...keep a frigate consistently on that part of the coast".²⁶⁹ Even though it was 5000 miles from the Cape, Pringle's successors maintained a patrol off the coast of South America. By early 1800, when the Cape received intelligence that a French expedition might be on its way to Mauritius via Rio de la Plata, Royal Navy patrols were kept up at an even higher rate and the replacing ship had to be on station at the South American coast, before the vessel on patrol could return.²⁷⁰ The working relationship with the Portuguese at Rio de Janeiro however was good and they provided the British with good intelligence regarding Spanish ship movements.

The list of ships on patrol off Rio de la Plata continued: on 7 September 1800 the *Tremendous* and *Star* sailed from the Cape to relieve the *Diomedé*. On 23 January, the *Lancaster* sailed to relieve the *Tremendous*, while the *Jupiter* sailed on 9 March 1801 to relieve the *Lancaster*. Some of these patrols took a long time, as the *Tremendous* and *Star* only returned in April 1801. Due to the south Atlantic sea conditions ships were often damaged and required urgent repairs on their return to the Cape. For example, when the *Diomedé* arrived back on 10 January 1801 she was in a very poor condition and she actually had to interrupt her patrol on the South American coast to put into Rio de Janeiro for repairs.²⁷¹

Keeping up these patrols were tough on the Cape squadron and on 25 June 1801 Curtis terminated it. He despatched the armed brig *Euphrosyne* to order the *Jupiter* to return immediately.²⁷² She was the last ship of the Cape squadron to patrol the Coast of South America. Curtis told the Admiralty that her return was "a fortunate circumstance" as they afterwards received intelligence from the Portuguese that there were two Spanish ships of the line and seven frigates (five Spanish and two French) at Rio de la Plata.²⁷³

²⁶⁸ NAUK WO1/178. Memorandum: Projected Expedition from the Cape against South America, 19/1/1797, p.105-9.

²⁶⁹ *Records of the Cape Colony*, II, Pringle – Nepean, 23/3/1797, p.67.

²⁷⁰ *Records of the Cape Colony*, III, Curtis – Nepean, 30/9/1800 and 11/1/1801 pp.300-1 and 400-4.

²⁷¹ NAUK ADM50/36, Journal of Proceedings ... Sir Roger Curtis ..., see 7/9/1800, 10/1/1801, 23/1/1801 and 9/3/1801.

²⁷² NAUK ADM50/36, Journal of Proceedings ... Sir Roger Curtis ..., see 25/6/1801.

²⁷³ *Records of the Cape Colony*, IV, Curtis – Nepean, 6/10/1801, pp.76-8.

7.3. The Great Naval Mutiny of 1797 and the Royal Navy at the Cape

During April and May 1797 mutinies broke out amongst the British fleets in the Channel and North Sea. Few ships were completely taken over by mutineers and even during the mutiny a sense of duty was maintained, as the mutineers refused to follow orders, unless “the enemy’s fleet should put to sea”. Officers were generally respected and only those known for their severity were sent ashore. In the Channel fleet the mutineers dictated the terms, but in the North Sea they failed. They certainly had valid grievances which were subsequently redressed. However, for a while a restive feeling remained in the Royal Navy.²⁷⁴

Later in 1797 Royal Navy crews in Simon’s Bay and in Table Bay mutinied after some instigators apparently arrived from Britain onboard the *HMS Arniston*. It first broke out on the flagship *HMS Tremendous*, on 7 October 1797 and immediately spread to the eight other ships.²⁷⁵ Admiral Pringle’s journal on the mutiny is sanitised and dry. When it broke out he simply wrote: “a general mutiny had broken out onboard the ships of the squadron in Simon’s Bay”.²⁷⁶ The crews seized the small arms onboard and put several officers ashore. All captains declared their ships “in a state of Rebellion”, except Captain Andrew Todd of the *HMS Trusty*, who rose from the ranks and apparently had a better understanding with his men.²⁷⁷

Pringle and all the Captains (except Captain George Stephens of the *HMS Tremendous*) were allowed onboard and treated with respect. They were just not allowed to command. When Pringle signalled for all Captains to join him on the flagship, they were kept there while the representatives of the mutineers served them with a list of grievances – Pringle referred to the representatives as “persons calling themselves delegates”.²⁷⁸ The main reasons for the mutiny, as in Britain, were poor food and a lack of pay. Fresh vegetables were specifically a problem as the VOC vegetable garden in Simon’s Bay was not maintained.²⁷⁹ In the list of grievances, submitted by the mutineers from the various ships, they wanted two Captains (both called Stephens) removed from command and court-martialled for misconduct, the Pursers had to be prevented from withholding seamen’s allowances unfairly, they wanted more time off, and they

²⁷⁴ A.T. Mahan, *Types of Naval Officers drawn from the History of the British Navy*, pp.358-9; and A.T. Mahan, *The influence of sea power upon the French Revolution and Empire*, I, pp.72-3.

²⁷⁵ CA BO160, Day Book, 7/10/1797, p.160.

²⁷⁶ NAUK ADM50/65, Proceedings of the Squadron under ... Pringle, see 8 and 9/10/1797.

²⁷⁷ *The Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas*, Barnard – Dundas, 15/10/1797, p.67.

²⁷⁸ NAUK ADM50/65, Proceedings of the Squadron under ... Pringle, see 8 and 9/10/1797.

²⁷⁹ D. Sleight, *Buiteposte*, p.336.

demanded that their leaders receive a pardon.²⁸⁰ Pringle apparently did not want to agree, but a Danish ship arrived with news that the mutiny in England was solved and that a number of the mutineers and their leaders were executed. The mutineers stressed that they would like their grievances to be attended to and that they would then continue with their duties.²⁸¹

When General Dundas heard about the mutiny, he immediately set off to Simon's Town with troops to secure the town. Apparently he did not believe that the crew's were really as defiant as they were made out to be and wanted to go board the *Tremendous* and then "calmly" and "reasonably" talk them to their senses. Happily he was dissuaded, otherwise both the naval and military commander might have been kept "prisoner". Pringle eventually agreed to have the two Stephens' court-martialled, the guilty Pursers tried, address the grievances and grant a general pardon.²⁸² It was thought that he might not have granted the conditions, if he was not a prisoner on his own ship. By 12 October the crews returned to "order, obedience and proper sense of their duty".²⁸³

The general feeling amongst the officials at the Cape was that the pardon should not have been granted and that the mutineers should have been made examples of, specifically as two vessels that arrived at Cape Town from St Helena, the *HMS Reasonable* and the *HMS Sphynx*, on 26 October also hoisted a blue jacket – the sign of mutiny. General Dundas was disgusted by the whole affair and wrote to Henry Dundas, "I am sorry to say, the officers appear to have lost the greatest part of their authority".²⁸⁴ Though he was trying to bring the situation under control General Dundas thought he should adapt far "more rigorous" measures, specifically after witnessing the riotous behaviour of some of the mutinous sailors that came ashore in Cape Town.²⁸⁵ Dundas ordered the whole Garrison into a camp at Rondebosch and only left a detachment to guard the Castle and the batteries, and placed the required guards in the town. As a result the mutinous behaviour of the sailors did not spill over to the soldiers, and Dundas warned that he would act summarily at the first signs of undisciplined behaviour.²⁸⁶

Order was soon restored and the crew of the *Reasonable* even apologised.²⁸⁷ Yet, it was not the end: on Tuesday 7 November mutiny erupted again amongst the crews of most of the

²⁸⁰ These grievances and the course of events are discussed in the correspondence to the Admiralty, see *Records of the Cape Colony*, II, Pringle – Nepean, 13/10/1797, pp.164-86.

²⁸¹ *The Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas*, Barnard – Dundas, 15/10/1797, pp.67-8.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ NAUK ADM50/65, Proceedings of the Squadron under ... Pringle, see 9 to 12/10/1797.

²⁸⁴ BL MS052/8, F. Dundas – H. Dundas, 29/10/1797.

²⁸⁵ *The Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas*, Barnard – Dundas, 30/10/1797, p.73.

²⁸⁶ BL MS052/8, F. Dundas – H. Dundas, 29/10/1797.

²⁸⁷ *Records of the Cape Colony*, II, Pringle – Nepean, 27/11/1797, p.209.

ships, with *Tremendous*, *Sceptre* and *Rattlesnake* being in “the most violent disorder”.²⁸⁸ At this stage the *Tremendous* was lying just off the *Amsterdam Battery*. The fort’s guns were loaded and the ovens were heated for firing red-hot-shot. On 9 November 1797 Pringle gave the mutineers an ultimatum, stating if they do not return to their normal duties within two hours, it would be considered as open rebellion. The mutineers on the ships decided to give up their ringleaders, instead of being fired upon by the coastal artillery.²⁸⁹ When the crew of *Crescent* delivered a list of grievances Pringle’s patience had worn thin. The *Jupiter* had to see to it that she anchor in front of the *Amsterdam Battery* and on 11 November and the crew were given only a few hours to deliver their ringleaders, which were “immediately complied with”.²⁹⁰

After the second mutiny broke out, Macartney explained to Henry Dundas that he is unsure of particular grievances that have caused the mutiny and ascribed it the local sailors “aping their fraternity in England”. He feared that the consequence will be “stricter discipline and a more uniform obedience ...”.²⁹¹ On 21 November a court martial sentenced two mutineers to death. Sentence was carried out on the *Sceptre* two days later, while two more were hanged on the *Tremendous* on 24 December 1797.²⁹² A few others were severely punished. Captain Stephens was court-martialled and honourable discharged.

When the sloop *Hope* was on a patrol along the coast of Madagascar in May 1799 her crew mutinied, but the situation was quickly brought under control by Captain Brine and his officers. When they arrived at the Cape, 22 of the ringleaders were charged. Curtis saw this in a very serious light and believed he would not do his duty if he did not act precipitously. Four men were sentenced to death in a court martial on the *Hope*, on 3 January 1800 and the next day they were summarily hanged on the flagship *Lancaster*.²⁹³ The “great mutiny” certainly placed a blemish on the reputation of the Royal Navy during a glorious period in her history. Nonetheless, onboard it was business as usual as the constant record of floggings and men to punishment in the logbooks and other shipboard documentation indicate.

²⁸⁸ NAUK ADM50/65, Proceedings of the Squadron under ... Pringle, see 7/11/1797.

²⁸⁹ *Records of the Cape Colony*, II, Pringle – Nepean, 27/11/1797, pp.206-8.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁹¹ BL MS052/2, Macartney – H. Dundas, 13/11/1797.

²⁹² NAUK ADM50/65, Proceedings of the Squadron under ... Pringle, 24/8/1795 to 19/5/1798.

²⁹³ NAUK ADM50/36, Journal of Proceedings ... Sir Roger Curtis ..., see 3 and 4/1/1800; and *Records of the Cape Colony*, III, Curtis – Nepean, 6/1/1800, p.18.

8. HANDING BACK THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE

Long before the British conquest of the Cape took place, Alleman prophetically stated: "I do not believe that the inhabitants will expose themselves to much danger or run the risk of being shot simply in order to escape living for a time under the English flag. One imagines that it would only be for a time, for when the terms of peace come to be settled, the Dutch would surely do anything rather than cede to the English a place so indispensable to them as the Cape".²⁹⁴ He could not have been more correct.

When the peace negotiations commenced, British opinion on the value of the Cape was divided. After a string of glorious naval victories, many believed that British supremacy at sea was assured without having to maintain such costly establishments as the Cape. While some thought it had to be maintained for strategic reasons, others condemned the expense, referring to it, like Lord Nelson in Parliament, as just a "tavern on the passage". Windham countered sharply, arguing the Cape might be a tavern, yet, "is not a tavern in the middle of so long a voyage a very important accommodation? Nay, without it, how can troops be sent out for the protection of our Eastern Empire?" He emphasised that the Cape was indeed crucial for projecting force to India and for the defence of the empire.²⁹⁵

The French privateers operating from Mauritius showed that a small force with a few minor warships were able to so "much mischief ... it required five years, with a very active and powerful squadron from the Cape and from India, before they were taken and destroyed". The supposition therefore was apparent (even though exaggerated). If the French and Dutch had a combined naval force at the Cape, "it is extremely doubtful if any of the homeward bound" EEIC fleets would reach Britain, "or if they did, it would be under an expense of convoy so enormous, that the profits on the cargoes would be inadequate to meet it".²⁹⁶

The economic value of the trade with the East and the strategic position of the Cape and Trincomalee did not escape the French. De la Croix told Malmesbury, if the British maintained both, the French possessions in India and the Indian Ocean, would be entirely at "the tenure of your will and pleasure; they will be ours only as long as you choose we should retain them; you will be sole masters in India, and we shall be entirely dependent on you ... your monopoly of the Indian trade has put you in possession of a fund of inexhaustible wealth".²⁹⁷ Barrow believed that as the French were aware of the value the Cape had to the British, they proposed that the

²⁹⁴ O.F. Mentzel, *Life at the Cape in Mid-Eighteenth Century*, p.156.

²⁹⁵ L.C.F. Turner, *The Cape of Good Hope*, pp.159-60 and the Parliamentary debate, pp.149-63.

²⁹⁶ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, p.191.

Cape should be handed back to the Dutch or become a free port the moment the peace negotiations commenced and they were not perturbed about the Dutch not getting Ceylon back, although it was of much more value to the Dutch than the Cape was.²⁹⁸

The preliminaries of the Peace of Amiens were signed on 1 October 1801 and on the same day William Pitt (British Prime Minister) informed Spencer that Britain retained the islands of Ceylon and Trinidad, but that the Cape was to be restored. Pitt was of the opinion that “on the whole I see nothing very materially to regret but the loss of the Cape; and even as important as that is...” the agreement was seen as good to Britain.²⁹⁹ The final Treaty of Amiens was signed on 27 March 1802. It stipulated that the Cape “remains in full Sovereignty to the Batavian Republic, as it was before the War” and specified that “ships of every Description belonging to the other contracting Parties shall have the Right to put in there, and to purchase such Supplies as they may stand in need of ...”³⁰⁰ Though the Cape was handed back, it was advantageous to Britain, as it could still fulfil its valuable role, without the burden of its administration.

The Dutch hoped that the French would protect their interest at the Amiens negotiations, yet they had to cede Ceylon and guarantee free shipping at the Cape. They complained to their allies about it, but the attitude of the French First Consul, Napoleon Bonaparte, was unremitting. He bluntly stated that the existence of the Batavian Republic, “... they hold only from us; we owe them nothing and they owe us everything ... if France and England make peace, what can a secondary power like Holland do, but adhere to it?”³⁰¹

News of the of the preliminary peace agreement arrived at the Cape in December 1801. A ship immediately left for India with the news and also had to take the preliminary articles of peace to Mauritius. The first Dutch ships to visit the Cape again were two corvettes that arrived on 18 and 25 March 1802, and left for Batavia on 10 April.³⁰² By August, Curtis reported that Dutch frigates and East Indiamen had become regular visitors at the Cape.

Preparations for handing back the Cape to the Dutch were now in full swing and Curtis was very anxious about moving British personnel, stores and soldiers back to Britain. The soldiers were too many for warships to carry as he had to organise transport for more than 2650

²⁹⁷ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, pp.199-200.

²⁹⁸ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, p.185.

²⁹⁹ *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, IV, Pitt – Spencer, 1/10/1801, p.304.

³⁰⁰ F.A. van Jaarsveld (ed), *Honderd Basiese Dokumente by die Studie van die Suid-Afrikaanse Geskiedenis 1648-1961*, p.39.

³⁰¹ S. Schama, *Patriots and Liberators. Revolution in the Netherlands, 1780-1813*, p.437.

³⁰² NAUK ADM50/36, Journal of Proceedings ... Sir Roger Curtis ..., see 14/12/1801, 25/3/1802 and 10/4/1802.

persons, while his ships could only carry 1670.³⁰³ He had to acquire more shipping space and when the British evacuated the Cape, there were four East Indiamen fitted out as transports.³⁰⁴

On 19 December 1802 the first Dutch administrative and military contingent arrived at the Cape onboard the *Pluto* (64), *Kortenaer* (64), *Maria Reigensbergen* (32) and a number of transport ships. They were under the command of Simon Dekker (the diligent Captain of the *Medemblik* in 1795, now a Rear-Admiral). All the warships were not fully armed. Dutch troops landed in Table Bay the next day, with the assistance of a number of British boats. Commissioner De Mist, General J.W. Janssens, many civil servants, other passengers and troops arrived at the Cape onboard the *Bato* (74) on 23 December and came ashore the following day.³⁰⁵

Some British soldiers (remnants of the 81st, part of the 91st and invalids) sailed at the beginning of December, while about 2000 British (troops from the 8th Light Dragoons, the 34th, 65th and 91st Regiments and artillerymen) remained. By late December the British were embarking personnel, while Dundas and De Mist agreed that the Batavian troops would take over the guard at the Castle and the other posts at 17:00 on 31 December 1802. The Batavian flag then had to be hoisted on the Castle at sunrise on 1 January 1803. On 30 December another Dutch corvette arrived and 1300 Batavian troops were now present at the Cape. Everything was set, when at noon on 31 December 1802, the *HMS Imogen* arrived with orders from Britain to delay the evacuation and the restoration of the Cape, as it was feared that war might break out soon. Dundas immediately ordered the 65th Regiment at Wynberg and the 91st Regiment in the Castle to man Craig's Tower and the blockhouses on the slopes of Devil's Peak, while the other troops disembarked. The British now had 2000 men in the defences of Cape Town.³⁰⁶

General Dundas proclaimed martial law on 2 January, while the Batavian troops put up camp at Rondebosch. The situation was very tense, a confrontation seemed possible and the two commanders were in a very "delicate and trying situation".³⁰⁷ Though they were uncertain about the British motives, Janssens and De Mist had to assure their troops that no hostility was meant against them. The suspense came to an end when orders to hand the Cape over to the Dutch, arrived on 19 February 1803. The Batavian Flag was eventually hoisted at sunrise on 21

³⁰³ NAUK ADM50/36, Journal of Proceedings ... Sir Roger Curtis ..., August 1802.

³⁰⁴ G.M. Theal, *History of South Africa since 1795*, I, p.96.

³⁰⁵ NAUK ADM50/36, Journal of Proceedings ... Sir Roger Curtis ..., December 1802.

³⁰⁶ G.M. Theal, *History of South Africa since 1795*, I, pp.95-6; NAUK ADM50/36, Journal of Proceedings ... Sir Roger Curtis ..., December 1802; and W. Brinton, *History of the British Regiments in South Africa*, p.20.

February 1803. Troops of the 8th Dragoons and the 34th and 65th Regiments sailed to India on 23 February, while the 91st Regiment and about 200 artillerymen embarked at the beginning of March for Britain. They were the last British troops to leave the Cape. On 3 March Admiral Curtis took leave of the Batavian officials and on 4 March General Dundas boarded the *Diomedé*.³⁰⁸ The First British Occupation of the Cape had officially ended.

9. CONCLUSION

So, what did Britain achieve during this war? In a speech he made to the British Parliament in March 1801 regarding British strategy in war since 1793, Henry Dundas summarised the events above appropriately: Since “navigation and commerce are inseparably connected”, Britain did “as early as we can at the commencement of war cut off the commercial resources of our enemies as by so doing we infallibly weaken or destroy their naval resources”. Dundas clearly understood that navies were crucial for maritime power projection and by doing as much damage as possible to commerce, an opponents’ sea power is damaged. He emphasised that British prosperity depended on commerce with the far flung parts of the empire. In war they therefore had to “cut off the colonial resources of the enemy”, in the same way that “the general of a great army destroy or intercept the magazines of his opponent”.³⁰⁹ Offensive operations against an enemy’s colonial possessions were therefore a first objective of the war and Dundas was convinced that it was exactly how the war was conducted.

The cost of conquest is always moderate compared to the cost of occupation. This was relevant to British control of the Cape, as it did not come cheap. Nevertheless, Britain was prepared to appropriate the resources necessary to secure it. In contrast with the VOC, Britain maintained a strong military and naval presence at the Cape and they did not hesitate to constantly apply that force if the protection of their interests required it. Another distinction with the last years of the VOC is the economic prosperity at the Cape during the British period. As Henry Dundas did not want the Cape to be just a small part of the vast Indian trade, it was not controlled by the EEIC, but became a Crown Colony.

Though the Dutch naval shipbuilding programme of the 1780’s was a success, the navy thus expanded did not endure because of the naval disasters of the late 1790’s. During the Wars of the French Revolution the situation was analogous to what occurred during the Fourth

³⁰⁷ J. Barrow, *Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, I, p.427.

³⁰⁸ NAUK ADM50/36, Journal of Proceedings ... Sir Roger Curtis ..., see January to March 1803.

³⁰⁹ H.W. Richmond, *Statesmen and Sea Power*, pp.338-9.

Anglo-Dutch War of 1780-84, when Dutch warships were locked in the roadstead off Texel by blockading British squadrons. The Dutch forces could rarely escape the net and if they did their voyages ended in disaster, as in the case of Lucas and De Winter. When a sizeable portion of the Navy of the Batavian Republic was captured at anchor at Den Helder in 1799, most crews still owed allegiance to the former Stadtholder, and they offered no resistance. The Dutch Navy would never again play a significant role in European naval politics.³¹⁰

The British squadron at the Cape were constantly on operational service and performed their tasks diligently. After capturing the Cape they supported Admiral Rainier in India and eliminated a naval threat – the Lucas expedition. For the rest they were involved in supporting the Royal Navy in the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, they were on constant patrols in the Indian Ocean, the coast of southern Africa and even along the coast of South America. In addition they convoyed homeward-bound ships from India and China to Britain, while warships that had to return to Britain often escorted a convoy East Indiamen.³¹¹ During this period they also succeeded in capturing and destroying a substantial number of enemy ships.

Navies in the great age of sail attempted to establish control of the sea, which took place by destructing an enemy's fleet, while they also had to keep maritime communications open, allow trade to take place and place as much limitations as possible on the trade of an enemy. This was where conflict at sea differed from conflict on land. To destroy an enemy army could be the most important objective, but at sea, states always had to protect their maritime interests and seaborne communications.³¹² If, however, an enemy's fleet emerged and it was possible to destroy it, the objectives could be achieved with even more ease. This was exactly the opportunity the Lucas fiasco and De Winter's short cruise provided to the British – their elation at its outcome was therefore obvious. In the end, British command of the sea was the best defence against maritime power projection.

Altogether Royal Navy ships brought 56 ships they captured back to the Cape, and destroyed a number of ships in the war at sea. In considering this, British fears of 1793-95, of how the Cape in French hands might impact on British maritime communications were justified. According to Barrow, the French Islands in the Indian Ocean were not of much use to the French during the war, and did not cause the British much concern, once French warships and

³¹⁰ J. R. Bruijn, *The Dutch Navy of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, pp.212 and 216.

³¹¹ The *HMS Trident* for example escorted a convoy East Indiamen from India and China to Britain in 1799; *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, IV, Rainier – Spencer, 30/7/1799, p.197.

³¹² A. Van Hengel, 'Het karakter van den zeeoorlog en de bescherming van de handelsscheepvaart' in *Marineblad*, 39 (1924), p.444.

privateers were destroyed by the Royal Navy operating from the Cape.³¹³ It was not that simple and the British records suggest that much anxiety existed about Mauritius. French privateers were constantly “hunted” down and even after most of the threat was eliminated, capturing Mauritius was still considered, as its mere existence posed a potential threat to British security. Patrols along the coast of South America placed a heavy burden on the squadron and though the British gained much intelligence, succeeded in capturing a number of prizes and maintained a British presence, they did not eliminate the threat to British shipping.

One of the reasons for the success of the Royal Navy between 1795 and 1803 was its excellent strategic mobility. It was made possible by the fact that resources were physically available, linked with a good planning capacity and good intelligence and the capability to move ships and soldiers rapidly across great distances to crisis areas. Due to its large operational area, it was difficult for the Cape squadron to fulfil all its responsibilities, yet they conducted operations with much success.

Barrow might be overly patriotic, but is nonetheless close to the truth when he wrote that “...our cruizers from the Cape kept the Southern Oceans completely clear of the enemy’s ships, and allowed the Indian squadron to make such choice of their cruizing ground, that between the two, not a French frigate escaped, nor scarcely a single privateer remained on the Mauritius station...”³¹⁴

Perhaps Mahan puts it best as he stated: “It is not the taking of individual ships or convoys, be they few or many, that strikes down the money power of a nation, it is the possession of that overbearing power on the sea which drives the enemy’s flag from it, or allows it to appear only as the fugitive, and by controlling the great common, closes the highway by which commerce moves to and from the enemy’s shores. This overbearing power can only be exercised by great navies”.³¹⁵ In the end this was part and parcel of the process through which the British cleared their enemy from the sea and established command of the sea during the Napoleonic era.

³¹³ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, p.183.

³¹⁴ J. Barrows, *An account of travels into the interior of Southern Africa*, II, pp.238-9.

³¹⁵ A.T. Mahan quoted in J. Baylis et al, *Strategy in the Contemporary World*, p.117.

CONCLUSION

Chapter 11

A BRIEF ASSESSMENT

One irrefutable aspect elucidated by this study is that war in the eighteenth century cannot for a moment be separated from politics and economy. For the various maritime empires involved, war was indeed as Clausewitz had stated, “nothing but the continuation of policy by other means”.¹ This notion of the inherent disposition of war is specifically relevant with regards to the foreign policy of the states involved and their relationship with other states. But this relationship was dictated by the economic position of a state (wealth, trade and resources), its policies as well as its geographic location. Britain’s location and the political and economic policies of her government made sea power, empire and command at sea possible. As this was the final years of the mercantilist age, war was accepted as part of the activities of man, while commerce was a battlefield where trading companies, traders and merchant vessels operated as combatants with tariffs and trading boundaries as weapons. And, the theory worked as trade did create wealth; wealth did facilitate the creation of larger naval and military establishments, which provided well-handled navies and armies the opportunity to enhance the power of the state.²

Moreover, to understand the history of the period under discussion one aspect must always be acknowledged: war was a central activity of states and it impacted on the nature of societies. The eighteenth century was a time of limited wars, fought mainly by small groups of military professionals for specific political, economic and military objectives. Though warfare underwent a transformation as a result of the wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon, in nature, concept and scope the operations conducted at the Cape were essentially eighteenth century.

As such the objectives of the various belligerents were either to defend the Cape, or to gain control of it for specific strategic purposes linked to mercantilist goals. The purpose was not to subjugate the whole country and its population in a general or “total” war; quite the opposite, if the purpose of gaining and defending the Cape could be achieved without having to fight, as Elphinstone and Craig tried in 1795, even better. In nature and scope the operations at

¹ M. Howard, *Clausewitz*, p.34.

² P.M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, pp.xxvii-xxviii; and M. Howard, *War in European History*, p.48.

the Cape, including the Lucas expedition and the British maritime and military control over the Cape, fit squarely into the framework of limited warfare of the enlightenment era. One aspect which might indicate a slight deviation to some is the involvement of an armed citizenry (in this case the Cape militia) in the various conflicts. Deploying citizen militia forces in combat was in line with the events during the American War of Independence, a definite deviation from limited war and a portent of the mass involvement of the citizenry in war during the Napoleonic Age. This could provide a rationale to argue that in this way the conduct of war at the Cape had already departed from its eighteenth century roots. Such an argument should be treated with much caution and could not be supported for the following reasons: firstly, in both scope and nature the conflict at the Cape was essentially and entirely limited, and secondly, the militia at the Cape existed and was used to assist with defence not as a result of the evolving nature of war, but because the VOC had a limited capacity to defend the Cape, and from its earliest years at the Cape, it had to rely on the local burghers to assist with the defence of the colony. In fact, recruiting and utilising irregular forces on a part-time basis was a common facet of colonial warfare as the discussion on Eastern empire had shown. Therefore, the use of locally raised forces in this case related to the nature of colonial warfare and not to the changing patterns in warfare.

The late eighteenth century was a period during which maritime empires competed for trade, sea power and valuable colonies. As a trading post or colony the Cape was not important: during the first century after the VOC established itself at the Cape, its value was rather in its geographic location as an indispensable refreshment station for ships on the long and often difficult voyage between Europe and Asia. However, it acquired pertinent strategic value as empire in the East and the sheer value of trade grew. With it came extensive French-British competition and greater involvement by European states in Eastern trade and empire. Therefore, control of the Cape became an issue of much strategic importance. Its control was perceived to be crucial for the protection of the sea route, securing of the valuable trade and the protection of empire in the East. In fact, British and Dutch decision-makers would often suggest that the Cape was the “key” to the East.

Predictably, the Cape became inextricably linked with the Anglo-French competition and confrontation for influence in the East, which happened at the cost of the once powerful, but fast declining VOC. At the same time the Dutch state also declined, which left a vacuum that further enhanced the strategic importance of the Cape, specifically as the competitors of the VOC quickly competed to fill the gap. In the end, it was Britain that acquired the domineering position.

It is difficult to say if the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War was the main cause of the fall of the VOC; perhaps it was just one factor amongst many. One of the most important factors in the demise of the VOC is undoubtedly its competition with the EEIC from 1680 onwards, which led to the profits of the VOC declining and the company being weakened and undermined. Though the VOC was still able to expand its trade early in the eighteenth century and the rivalry between the two companies was not bitter, in the second part of the eighteenth century the EEIC was certainly the most powerful European mercantile force in Asia with substantial support from the British state.³ Even if the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War was not the primary cause of the fall of the VOC, it revealed internal weaknesses in the VOC and forced it into the hands of the Dutch state that tried to uphold it. Therefore, when the era of the Stadtholder came to an end and the United Provinces fell, the VOC fell with it.

During the time of the First British Occupation, the Cape was, as Richmond justly observed, “looked on as a burden, useless as a colony, costly to hold, and a place whose possession was justified only, though fully justified, by the needs of sea power and security”.⁴ Though later historians and theorists questioned the true value of the Cape, as well as the emphasis placed on its strategic location as the “key” to the East, the focus no doubt, must be on how it was perceived at the time by the main actors and states involved. This is specifically important, as it was their views that dictated the objectives, or the grand strategy of the various states, and from this they formulated their military strategy and decided upon the application of military power. After all, it was the strategic outlook of the maritime empires of the period that affected the Cape, impinged on the history of South Africa and had a vast influence on world politics and economics.

Since Elizabethan times the English understood very well the value of secure maritime communications and the potential riches it could bring. As a result, they fought many maritime wars in an effort to hinder or destroy the trade of their opponent and protect their own. The history of the rise of British sea power is the history of Britain and by establishing command of the sea, Britain did not only destroy her adversaries (such as the VOC) but it also ensured British prosperity. With the Cape in British hands, France would not be able to threaten India without a fleet in the Indian Ocean, while such a fleet would have found it difficult to reach the Indian Ocean, past the Cape, without the victuals and constant supplies it received from the

³ F.S. Gaastra, ‘War, *Competition* and Collaboration ...’ in H.V. Bowen, M. Lincoln and N. Rigby, *The World of the East India Company*, p.67.

⁴ H.W. Richmond, *Statesmen and Sea Power*, p.182.

Cape. After 1795, British cruisers based at the Cape were very successful against French warships and privateers, and secured British interest and trade in the Indian Ocean.

A very brief, but telling passage concerning the British strategic objectives, the capture of the Cape and the surrender of Lucas, is in a letter Blankett wrote to Earl Spencer. In it, Blankett reassured Spencer that their military actions “will effectually secure India” and that nothing was achieved but with the “energy and activity of the English”.⁵ This is not only indicative of the clear strategic grasp that dictated the actions of British commanders, but also indicates how their vigilant actions were aimed at obtaining the military objectives that formed part of the wider strategy.

Britain was now a great sea power and had possession of the Cape, which gave her much power over trade and communications between the East and Europe.⁶ As a sea power Britain had eclipsed both the Netherlands and France and was even more powerful than the combined might of the two countries at sea. The influence of sea power was great and the example of this era certainly added value to the words of a recent observer, Sergei Gorshkov (Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Union), who stated: “History shows that those states which do not have naval forces at their disposal have not been able to hold the status of a great power for very long”.⁷

Evidently the history of war, or the “great mass of phenomena” as Clausewitz stated, is crucial to our understanding of strategic theory, as historical analysis serves to validate theory (or it can even annul theory). History also showed that tactical, and to a lesser extent operational concepts have changed over time and were influenced by technology and societal factors, while strategic theory was essentially a constant.

Therefore, the study of military history is not merely concerned with an analysis of campaign detail, but also with the preparation for war in the broad and more interdisciplinary context. This implies understanding the phenomenon of war, its impact on the conduct of operations and its far-reaching influence on society. As such military history contributes to our understanding of South African history and in this case it can specifically enhance our insight into the strategic objectives of states and the fact that the Cape was essentially a pawn in the hands of powerful maritime empires. The destiny of the Cape was indeed determined by war and dire cognisance must be taken of the effect of war on the history of the Cape, and South Africa for that matter.

⁵ *Private Papers of George Earl Spencer*, I, Blankett (wrongly spelt as Blackett) – Spencer, 19/8/1796, pp.276-7.

⁶ J. Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, II, pp.238-9.

⁷ S.G. Gorshkov, 1974, quoted in J. Baylis et al, *Strategy in the Contemporary World*, p.117.

War essentially have two forms: if one belligerent wishes to take something from an opponent, it is an offensive war and operations will be aimed at depriving an opponent of territory, supplies or other necessities, while a defensive war is the endeavour to prevent an enemy from taking possession of something, with operations aimed at holding your own. Strategy is therefore either offensive or defensive in nature. If applied, it is evident that there was always a threat to the Cape, made possible by maritime power projection, and always a defender. Though it is not always the case, the stronger power usually waged an offensive war, while the weaker would be on the defensive. The attack provided huge potential advantages, but then initiative and surprise are crucial to its success.⁸ A good example is the strategic surprise by Elphinstone and Craig, compared to the inability of the Lucas operation to maintain the element of surprise.

However, when fighting on the offensive it does not only imply attacking, while the defensive can also be an active defence, going over to the offensive whenever possible. For example, in the war Britain took the offensive at sea, projected her power and conducted many offensive operations, but from 1795 onward she essentially fought a defensive war as the British emphasised securing and consolidating the empire they had gained. Even during this grand defensive, Britain still took the offensive against an enemy whenever it appeared, again with the purpose of defence. The British conducted the defence of the Cape with energy and vigour, and took the offensive against an enemy when it appeared, as they did with Lucas. Furthermore, the actions against the French Navy and French privateers were in defence of British interest, as its purpose was securing British trade. The example, however, also pertains to De Suffren. He realised that if he wished to defend the Cape, he had to attack Johnstone's fleet at Porto Praya.

Defence is very powerful and many advantages could be derived from it. To defend the Cape against maritime power projection provided the defenders with much depth. Its geography favoured the defence as much of the coastline around the peninsula was unassailable, the surrounding area was vast and did not provide many opportunities to an attacking force in terms of infrastructure and landing sites, and finally, Cape Town was the seat of power and had to be taken for any conquest to succeed. If the defender had a navy to prevent an enemy from even attempting a landing (as the presence of De Suffren's force proved), it made the defence much stronger. Before the British period, warships were not

⁸ IMH Milo37, Oorlog, Strategie en Tactiek, unpublished paper, no venue or date, pp.5-6.

always available and the defenders of the Cape created fortifications and maintained a garrison in an effort to deter or inhibit an attacking force.

With the exception of the Anglo-Dutch Sea Wars, which were essentially maritime trade wars, conflicts where armies did not fight each other were extremely rare, and if a task force capable of performing amphibious landings entered the equation, it could completely change the nature of the war. This was the situation during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, as the war also became an exercise in both maritime power projection and defence against maritime power projection, due to the Johnstone expedition and French assistance. Britain projected its power to the Cape and the East, while the French assisted the Dutch by providing both warships and troops. As a result, the defence of the Cape during this war was aided by a naval force, and rested on an improved system of fortifications and a large garrison. Yet, it was essentially a naval action that turned the scales and secured the Cape.

The nature of a war was dependent on its objectives. As a result, war was just the logical result of existing conditions and relationships. This was evident in the objectives and actions of the maritime empires. Maritime power projection was a favourite tool, because trade had to be secured, but for the creation of trading empires, secure bases and secure maritime communications (or sea routes) became crucial. In this way, command of the sea could be established.

In the competition between the maritime empires for strategic located bases and control of the sea, naval forces were usually a most important tool because their inherent flexibility and mobility made it possible to project power ashore, or provide defence against maritime power projection. Sea power enabled Britain to send a fleet to the Cape, while the lack of a comparable ability on the Dutch or French side, led to the British conquering the Cape in 1795. Sea power also made the relative speed and surprise of this campaign possible and enabled the British to blockade the Cape, and intimidate the defenders, before they conducted a campaign ashore. After the conquest a Royal Navy squadron was immediately stationed at the Cape. They defended it and acted with impunity when the ill-fated Lucas expedition arrived in 1796. In essence the active presence of the Royal Navy in the surrounding seas clearly illustrated Britain's commitment and indicated to her enemies that it was virtually impossible to retake the Cape with force of arms. This was part of the whole process through which Britain achieved naval mastery.

This was a "golden age" of amphibious warfare for the British Royal Navy. Due to British sea power and her expertise in amphibious warfare, the British Army of the late eighteenth century gained much mobility and striking force that was disproportionate to its size and the

forces involved. To have a sufficient troop force was important, but experience has shown that the shipping and transportation of regiments across the oceans to the theatre of operations, was difficult as they often suffered many fatalities during the voyage. Consequently, in colonial conflicts smaller forces often achieved results out of proportion to their size. In the case of the Cape, the difficulties experienced with transporting large bodies of troops, implied that smaller forces were engaged in both the attack and the defence. In European terms only a handful of defenders were available at the Cape in 1795, and even after Clarke arrived with a "large" attacking force, it was still small in comparison. It was therefore relatively small forces that made conquests of vast value to the imperial interests of Britain; a tendency that continued as it would still be relative small forces engaged in colonial campaigns during the next century.

From the above it is evident that defence of a territory against maritime power projection should ideally entail an integrated three tiered approach ranging from naval forces that had to interdict, destroy or restrain a hostile naval force, to fixed coastal defences to repulse a sea based attack, prevent enemy landings, or deter an aggressor; while landward defensive forces actively had to thwart landings or eliminate an invading force. Obviously, defence could either be layered, or the various elements could operate jointly.

The British quickly comprehended that since their main rivals in the East were other maritime empires that posed a threat to their interests through their navies and maritime power projection, their first line of defence was the navy, the ability to stop an enemy at sea if possible. The fate of the reinforcements destined for the East under the Comte De Bussy in 1782, is a very telling case in point. When the force sailed, it did so in four separate detachments, to concentrate at Santa Cruz, Tenerife. But French secrecy failed to conceal the expedition from British spies and though the first and third detachments reached the rendezvous point unscathed, the other two were interdicted at sea and only two transport ships of the second detachment joined the main force, while the whole fourth detachment was either captured or had to return to port. Though De Bussy reinforced the Cape, he failed in his main objective, since the French were unable to establish the overwhelming force they needed in the East.

Admiral Colomb, the well-known British naval theorist, explained that territory was usually open to attack from the sea (in spite of local defences like fortifications and garrisons), if warships were not present to defend the surrounding sea. He emphasised that the following elements were crucial for the success of the attacker: command of the sea, no unnecessary exposure to dangerous fire from forts, good co-operation between the naval and military commander and sufficient force for the attack. Failure was often the result of insufficient force, too much emphasis placed on the effect a fleet on its own could have, or not enough speed

(urgency) in executing the campaign. As a result, landings by a strong military force, sufficiently clear of fortifications, well supported by a fleet, should theoretically not fail.⁹

Applying the Colomb thesis produced interesting results: in the attack and defence of the Cape Elphinstone established control of the sea, while Lucas could not even succeed with temporary sea denial. Elphinstone did not expose his valuable warships to any unnecessary fire from fortifications and attacked from False Bay, where fortifications were lacking. The co-operation between Elphinstone and Craig was good during both the attack on, and the defence of the Cape. Eventually, after the arrival of Clarke, the British had sufficient force available, while they initially nearly made the error of relying too heavily on the effect a fleet alone could have and if Clarke's reinforcements did not arrive, they would have had insufficient force and the whole expedition could have failed. Lucas essentially failed on all the criteria Colomb identified: he had insufficient force, through naivety too much emphasis was placed on the effect the arrival of his force would have at the Cape, while the whole expedition lacked urgency and speed.

One can add to this the Richmond emphasis on decisiveness as important criteria for success, and not only the size and complexity of the force or the type of campaign.¹⁰ Two attempts to capture the Cape, by Johnstone and Lucas, failed partly due to indecisiveness. Both the Johnstone and Lucas expeditions took much time to reach the Cape and both commanders did not act quickly and decisively. Though Johnstone had the men and material to launch an attack, he chose not to challenge the French forces present and seemed wary of De Suffren's pugnacious approach. De Suffren, on the other hand, was precisely successful because of his decisiveness – he immediately grasped the situation and attacked the British force when he accidentally ran into it at Porto Praya. By so doing he delayed Johnstone, reached the Cape first and secured it. Though the Cape was too well-defended for the poorly equipped Lucas expedition to achieve success, if Lucas acted decisively he could at least have escaped and saved his force. In capturing the Cape, Elphinstone and Craig acted forcefully and with decision and they did what had to be done to be successful. Also in defence, the same decisive and energetic spirit prevailed.

With decisiveness goes secrecy and good intelligence, which were valuable to decision-making and crucial for success. Belligerents aimed at gaining information about an enemy, while trying to prevent an enemy from doing the same. Intelligence alone did not ensure military success, while the action or inaction, military skills, disposition, preparations and a variety of

⁹ P.H. Colomb, *Naval warfare*, pp.251, 278 and 430.

¹⁰ H.W. Richmond, *Imperial Defence and Capture at Sea in War*, p.117.

other variables were crucial for success. However, correct decisions could not be made without intelligence, or with the wrong intelligence. To acquire reliable intelligence in time was difficult due to the distances involved and the slowness and relative unreliable nature of maritime communications. In the history of overseas expeditions and great military operations, a lack of secrecy has often contributed to failure. When intelligence of the Johnstone expedition leaked out, it probably accelerated the departure of De Suffren with troops to reinforce the Cape, while the French despatched a fast corvette that provided early warning to the Cape and gave them time to prepare. Essentially the Johnstone expedition failed because of a lack of secrecy and insufficient precautions during the voyage. Secrecy and efficacy made the speed and surprise of the Elphinstone expedition possible, while intelligence of the Lucas expedition leaked out and British ships detected the Dutch fleet as they departed from Texel. Good intelligence therefore, made it possible to warn the Cape and substantially reinforce it.

Gaining intelligence was only one side of the coin, since guarding intelligence was just as valuable in war. To prevent important intelligence about the Cape and its military and naval disposition from falling into enemy hands during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, neutral ships that visited the Cape were often prevented from sailing for a while, and though it caused tension with Denmark, it added to secrecy. In addition, the movement of British citizens at the Cape, and onboard neutral ships, was controlled as they could act as spies because they were either prevented from coming ashore, or were interned at VOC outposts. After Elphinstone and Craig arrived at the Cape in 1795 several senior British officers travelled from Simon's Town to Cape Town and were allowed to freely wander around Cape Town, observing its defences. In this way they had the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the strengths and weaknesses of the Cape defensive system and gained valuable operational intelligence. Elphinstone on the other hand, blockaded the Cape, intercepted communications and intelligence (even onboard neutral ships) and prevented it from reaching the defenders of the Cape.

As can be surmised from the above, and as Clausewitz emphasised, preparation for war was just as important as the conduct of war itself. Examples abound, and ranges from the operational readiness of navies during the 1790's, to preparing the fixed defences of the Cape. Warship statistics were not necessary an indication of actual naval strength as ships could be unseaworthy and in a poor state of repair, or they could lack the competent and experienced officers and crews that would make it an effective fighting force. As a case in point, the fact that the Navy of the Batavian Republic systematically met its ruin was to a great extent due to the political division within it, inexperienced political appointees in senior command positions, its unpreparedness as a fighting force and poor discipline.

Regarding the fixed defences of the Cape, much effort went into placing it on a secure footing with French assistance in the early 1780's, as the fortifications were improved and a substantial number of troops were garrisoned at the Cape. Some momentum was maintained during the rest of the decade, but in the early 1790's the defences of the Cape were severely lacking, as the number of troops had drastically declined and many fortifications had become dilapidated, mainly because of its high cost to the VOC. By 1795 False Bay was poorly defended while the French Lines did not extend high enough onto Devil's Peak, and because of its poor condition, there was not much trust in it as a defensive position. Fixed defences were therefore inadequately prepared.

Strategically Britain emphasised the value of the Cape, and its overall defence received much attention. As a result, substantial and expensive resources were allocated to its defence – essentially good military preparations. The security of the Cape was guaranteed. Sufficient resources were obviously just as important as strategic grasp and will – the relationship between war and cash. The VOC and the Dutch might have had the strategic grasp and valued the Cape, but without the required budget and will, they were unable to channel the resources the defence of the Cape required.

Strategically located bases have always supported maritime operations and were essential for the offensive as well as the defensive. Naval bases served empires. Without naval bases, warships could not be maintained to defend empires and do damage to the interest of an enemy in time of war. Bases enabled navies to conduct operations in distant seas, while the loss of a base could have a crippling effect on the defence of an empire, or part of it.¹¹ As it acted as a naval base to the British, this was the value the Cape had for them.

Throughout history well-located bases were crucial for an effective attack on commerce by an inferior fleet, evading a superior. The British knew this, as they were in the position of being the inferior maritime power in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. By the late eighteenth century, when in control of the Cape, they were constantly worried about the French presence in the Indian Ocean and when Spain became an ally of France, the security of British shipping in the South Atlantic also became a concern. Consequently British warships from their base at the Cape regularly conducted patrols along the coast of South Africa, in the Indian Ocean and around the French islands, while a ship or ships constantly maintained a presence along the South American coast. Indeed, a substantial responsibility for the hard-pressed Cape squadron. British apprehension about the possible French presence at the Cape was

¹¹ H.W. Richmond, *Imperial Defence and Capture at Sea in War*, pp.108-9.

understandable, as a few poorly supported French warships and privateers from Mauritius damaged British shipping in the Indian Ocean and caused much anxiety to the British. Furthermore, British ships from the Cape managed to capture many ships, despite the depleted nature of the seaborne trade of their enemies. If a strong French-Dutch squadron therefore operated from the Cape, it could have severely impeded British maritime communications.

As stated above defence against maritime power projection should ideally entail an integrated three-tiered approach, essentially “defence in depth”, which can also be seen as a layered approach to defence, from the sea to the land. The theoretical notion that navies were the first line of defence and that the security of bases or territory could only be guaranteed by superiority at sea,¹² was indeed shown to be accurate. To possess the ability for maritime power projection is only part of the picture. Despatching a large fleet across the oceans was precarious without command of the sea, as Johnstone learned in 1781, to have to fight an enemy fleet at sea and keep a large convoy secure, could be difficult.

To conduct a successful amphibious campaign far from home on an enemy coast and succeed, was a difficult undertaking. Forces had to be secure while conducting operations from the sea to the land. This simply means that the ships and boats placing forces ashore had to be protected from attack from both the sea and the land, while warships had to provide naval gunfire support to forces landing or conducting operations ashore. Though maritime power projection has taken place in situations where command of the sea was not a certainty, the country despatching the force at least had to be relatively certain that temporary or local superiority, or control of the sea in the theatre of operations would be possible. Lucas for example failed on this score. De Suffren, however, succeeded as Johnstone was too reluctant to challenge him. Without a naval presence at the Cape, it was open to an attack from the sea, it could be cut-off and blockaded, while the attacker established local superiority of the sea and intimidated the defenders. To their credit the Dutch understood this well, but their resources were too limited to place a naval squadron at the Cape. As a result, they were prepared to allow the British to station warships at the Cape in 1793, but not a garrison. In 1795 Elphinstone utilised his commanding naval position around the Cape to the full by controlling ship movements around the Cape, and when Craig conducted operations against the Dutch position at Muizenberg, naval gunfire support was fundamental to British success.

Being able to combine actions by naval and land forces had many advantages, as it provided an attacker with the choice of where and often of even when to fight. In defence it

¹² H.W. Richmond, *Imperial Defence and Capture at Sea in War*, p.111.

gave mobility and depth. The British understood this well from 1795 onwards. As attackers, they threatened and intimidated the Dutch defenders, while the possibility of changing the angle of their attack, for example attacking in Table Bay, always existed. As defenders of the Cape in 1796 they could utilise their command of the sea and destroy a naval threat, while ashore their landward forces made sure that they eliminate any potential threat.

With hindsight it is evident that during the great age of sail navies had a dualistic function: on the one hand they strove to establish unfettered control of the sea, which had to take place by the destruction of the enemy's fleet (but this was not always possible when it was safely in port), while on the other hand, they had to keep maritime communications open. The type of ships that formed the nucleus of the Royal Navy during the wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon were the ships of the line, the heavy gladiators of their day designed to seek out the enemy fleet and destroy it. This was the fate that befell the Navy of the Batavian Republic and eventually the combined naval might of France and Spain. Such a fleet was therefore essentially designed to, and capable of creating command of the sea, but with that established, the other customary tasks of protecting trade and sea routes of communication would be so much easier. This was also where conflict at sea differed from conflict on land; to destroy an enemy army could be the most important objective for armies, while at sea states always had to protect their maritime interests or communications. But, if an enemy fleet did emerge and provided its opponent with an opportunity to destroy it, so much the better. In this way the British established their naval eminence.

Though French naval doctrine by the second half of the eighteenth century emphasised that it was more important to avoid battle and concentrate on destroying the enemy's commerce, De Suffren was one of the few exceptions in the French naval history. He realised that war at sea was about local superiority at sea, that the navy was created to fight, and that all other objectives could be reached with more ease afterwards. De Suffren's approach, however, was not much supported in France as French naval commanders often declared that taking a convoy is of more value to the King than a glorious battle at sea, or that keeping commerce secure was more important than taking on the enemy fleet. The French perception that the navy should avoid battle and focus on supporting territory and trade, in the end resulted in them losing both to the British.¹³ De Suffren's achievements were significant; with his aggressive approach he secured the Cape, retook VOC possessions in the East, fought the British Royal

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A. Van Hengel, 'Het karakter van den zeeoorlog en de bescherming van de handelsscheepvaart' in *Marineblad*, 39 (1924), pp.445-6.

Navy and Admiral Hughes to a standstill and blocked further British conquests (through maritime power projection) in the Indies during the war.

The successes of British cruisers in capturing enemy vessels did much damage to the trade of her opponents during the various wars discussed, and had much strategic effect. As Richmond argued, the capture of enemy shipping was also a defensive measure as it protected British possessions against maritime power projection. British strategy constantly involved dispatching task forces overseas to capture an important post or in defence of trade and possessions. For this a large number of ships, both naval and commercial vessels, were required. By depleting an enemy's navy and merchant marine through capture and destruction, it made it impossible for an enemy to pose a threat without sufficient shipping. At the same time, however, the British naval and commercial ability experienced a drastic increase due to the large number of vessels captured.¹⁴ Most of the Dutch ships that the British captured at the Cape went straight into Royal Navy service. Even a sturdy East Indiaman was often valuable in a naval role: Elphinstone was for example elated about the *Willemstadt en Boetzelaar*, referring to her as "most completely found" and immediately commissioned her as the *HMS Princess*.¹⁵ The naval ability of the Batavian Republic, both in the East and in Europe, was systematically destroyed, first by the French and then by the British. Eventually the Batavian Navy was no longer a military factor to be reckoned with by the Royal Navy and without a navy the Batavian Republic could not threaten to the security of the Cape.

Success in war at sea is often statistically calculated on the bases of which side suffered the most losses. Yet, what was usually more important, did tactical successes produce any strategic gains. Battle is a function of strategy, and a tactical victory is only of value if it had strategic impact. In fact, a tactical defeat could even be a strategic victory, while a tactical victory could be strategically insignificant.¹⁶ The action at Porto Praya is a good example. De Suffren's objective was to defend the Cape as well as French and Dutch possessions in the East against British maritime power projection. When he stumbled upon Johnstone at Porto Praya, he attacked immediately, but as he did not receive sufficient support from his Captains during the action, he lost two of his best Captains, some of his ships obtained much damage and he withdrew after heavy fighting. This was most probably a tactical defeat, yet he made for the Cape as fast as he could, while Johnstone repaired the damage De Suffren's surprise attack caused. The result was that De Suffren arrived first, disembarked his troops and secured the

¹⁴ H.W. Richmond, *Imperial Defence and Capture at Sea in War*, pp.256-8.

¹⁵ *Keith Papers*, I, Elphinstone – Dundas, 12/09/1795, p.362.

¹⁶ IMH Milo 37. Lezing: Oorlog, Strategie en Tactiek, unpublished, no venue or date, p.15.

Cape, while Johnstone failed. Through De Suffren's clear grasp of the situation and the judicious deployment of his force in time and space, the outcome was a strategic success, despite a tactical setback.

One of the reasons for British successes between 1795 and 1803 was the excellent strategic mobility of the Royal Navy. This was made possible by the fact that forces were physically available, linked with good planning and good intelligence. Ships and soldiers were rapidly moved across great distances to crisis areas or locations where they were most needed. Again, examples abound: when it became clear that it would be impossible for Elphinstone and Craig to reach a decision without reinforcements, it was possible to order Clarke's force to the Cape from across the Atlantic Ocean. When the Cape was threatened by a Dutch-French force, Britain managed to reinforce it with a substantial number of troops and warships. Shortly afterwards these forces were transferred to the East. With a French force in Egypt and Tipu Sahib posing a threat, Britain reinforced India with troops despatched from Portugal, Gibraltar and the Cape. Furthermore, the forces of Popham and Blankett, despatched to operate in the Red Sea, were also supported from the Cape. Though the actual fighting was often limited in nature, in conception this was truly war on a worldwide scale.

Naval power was ultimately a crucial factor in Britain's success. It permitted British maritime trade to carry on uninterrupted and protected, while Britain strangled the trade of her enemies, succeeded in conquering much of her enemy's colonies and bases, and did much economic devastation (specifically in the case of the Netherlands). Proper British exploitation of her naval supremacy, lead to prosperity and increased her possessions and international influence.

If naval protection failed or was not available, territory or secure bases had to be capable to hold their own in amphibious operations or against landward attacks. Fortifications were very important for the defence of posts and bases for the maritime empires and opponents often fought for their control. Effective fortifications and fortified positions were important in the defensive as well as in the offensive. Good fortifications were difficult for warships to attack because they were stable gun platforms, usually above sea level, which had a fundamental impact on range and accuracy in an age of direct fire. They therefore had the potential to cause major damage to warships.¹⁷ Table Bay had an impressive system of fixed defences that was expensive to create and maintain. It included large batteries like the *Amsterdam* and *Chavonnes*, while most of the batteries were capable of accurately firing red-hot-shot. This

¹⁷ A.T. Mahan, *Naval strategy*, p.435; and C.E. Callwell, *Military Operations and Maritime Preponderance*, pp.60 and 77.

system was certainly a substantial threat to warships and their mere existence dissuaded attackers from launching an attack in Table Bay. In this sense the fortifications of the Cape were effective as it did deter attackers.

Though defensive positions could be very formidable, packed a severe punch and were difficult to capture, they only had value if they were the main focus of an attack, or if an enemy attack could only achieve success by neutralising such defences or capturing them. The result was that opposing forces often blockaded a base in an effort to “seal” it off, conducted amphibious landings out of range of forts with the intention to sidestep or outflank them, and attacked forts from behind in an effort to force a decision without having to besiege fortified positions. Elphinstone and Craig landed in False Bay, where no substantial system of fortifications existed. In the final British advance on Cape Town, there were doubts about the effectiveness of the French Lines as they were not well maintained and did not reach high enough onto the slopes of Devil’s Peak. In this sense the fortifications of the Cape were unsuccessful because of their inherent inflexibility and incompleteness.

In addition, protected anchorages provided safety for hard pressed warships or merchantmen seeking refuge from war or weather. If threatened by a superior naval force, weaker forces could stay under the protection of a fort without risk. Dutch ships at anchor in Table Bay in 1795, were unscathed under the protection of the fortifications, and only fell into British hands after the surrender of the Cape.

Offensively maritime power projection hinged upon strongholds as operations were conducted from them, while defence against maritime power projection also required strongholds or bases. When the British defended the Cape in 1796, the protection it offered as a base was indispensable. Elphinstone’s ships could repair their storm damage in Simon’s Bay before setting off again, this time to Saldanha Bay, while Craig marched up from a secure base (Cape Town) to confront the Dutch force in Saldanha Bay.

In defence against maritime power projection, landward forces had to await the landing or attempted landing of an attacking force. Then they could either endeavour to prevent amphibious landings, or destroy the offensive capacity of an enemy force after it had conducted landings by inducing it with military power to depart or surrender. Ideally, defending landward forces should conduct defensive-offensive operations with a strong military force in an effort to attack and crush an invader as quickly as possible. A strong military force can obviously also act as a good deterrent and dissuade a potential aggressor from even considering amphibious operations in the first place.

In 1781 Johnstone and Medows decided not to conduct operations ashore as the combined French-Dutch landward military forces, in conjunction with De Suffren's warships, acted as an effective deterrent. Both the Dutch (with French assistance) during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War and the British later on, relied heavily on military forces and fortifications, appreciating their role and inherent deterrent value. The depleted Dutch force that had to face an invader in 1795 failed dismally, the British easily gained a foothold ashore, while the Dutch never conducted defensive-offensive operations in an effort to dislodge the attacker. The Dutch lost the initiative from the beginning, stayed on the defensive, while due to internal differences and political strife even this defence was less than half-hearted. The opposite was true in 1796. The Cape received substantial military reinforcements and Craig took the offensive, as he marched up to Saldanha Bay after he secured the Cape and the surrounding area. Yet, despite the preparations by Craig and the army, the Dutch effort was effectively thwarted by the Royal Navy.

As much was already said about how the attackers and defenders performed, perhaps a few general, albeit simplified, remarks will suffice. By the late eighteenth century most VOC officials showed ineptness as far as military matters were concerned and the former zealotry, with which a massive trade empire was created, had gone. A telling example was the disregard for their orders and the imprudence shown by the Captains of the VOC ships in both Saldanha Bay and Hout Bay in 1781. This was indicative of the poor state in which VOC affairs were and of an incredible fear of the British Royal Navy. Sending Van de Graaff to the Cape was a poor choice and though the defences of the Cape were improved during his tenure, he wasted the scarce resources of the VOC, which was specifically unacceptable as the VOC drifted into bankruptcy. British administration, with the exception of Yonge, was generally good while administrators, sailors and soldiers seemed to have grasped the strategic rationale for having the Cape in the first place.

The two most prominent military commanders were Gordon and Craig. Gordon was certainly a talented and extraordinary individual. Despite many claims to the contrary, his writings indicated a good military appreciation and strategic grasp, while his improvement of the procedures for using red-hot-shot, showed his technical abilities. A charismatic and animated figure to his friends and foreigners, he certainly had a knack to fall out with superiors, like Van de Graaff, while to subordinates like Marnitz he seemed arrogant and conceited. Due to his political convictions and the situation at the Cape in 1795, Gordon's military ability was not tested.

Of Craig's private life at the Cape we know less, but much exist that bears testimony to his professional dexterity. The record suggests that Craig was an energetic soldierly figure that took to command well and possessed a single-minded ability to pursue the objectives he was given. He did not hesitate to do what was necessary if the war required it, yet as an administrator he seemed very accommodating, as long as British authority was respected and order maintained. He strongly supported establishing a free trade zone at the Cape to alleviate the depressive economic situation, at the same time he vigorously improved the fixed defences of the Cape and he was prepared to act decisively against internal unrest.

Of the four most notable naval commanders, De Suffren, Johnstone, Elphinstone and Lucas, two were successful and two failed. De Suffren is internationally probably the most renowned of these figures. He had shown an intuitive ability to act and to make quick decisions in the heat of battle, he was a resolute leader that set high standards for his subordinates, was daring and steadfast in achieving his aims – altogether a capable military commander. Johnstone did not have enough driving force, lacked initiative, was a poor commander with little leadership ability and seemingly had no urge to seek out his enemy and fight him wherever and whenever he could be found. His expedition was essentially a raid, as he decided not to risk attacking the Cape and rather went for the rich prizes, which became a serious financial and moral blow to the Dutch. Appointing Johnstone as commander of such an important expedition was a poor choice and it remains an enigma.

In general the British Admirals stationed at the Cape indicate that the Royal Navy at its zenith was a superior and capable service, lead by a professional officers' class. Elphinstone was probably the naval commander that influenced affairs at the Cape most. His contemporaries saw him as an intelligent and benevolent commander. The working relationship between him and Craig was good, emphatic trust existed between the two and their correspondence is proof of an open, co-operative spirit. Despite constant complaints about his health, he was vigorous in pursuing his duty, while his superiors placed much trust in his ability to make the right command decisions. As a commander he showed exceptional administrative and organisational skill, which is illustrated by the way in which he managed and maintained his ships and men. He informed his superiors about his decisions, often referring to alternatives and explaining why a specific option was selected. Considering the distance from Britain, he maintained extremely good and regular communication with the Admiralty, Dundas and other officials. When the navy was called upon to act, he knew what his responsibilities were and energetically prepared and applied his ships, getting them ready for action and exerting himself to find and neutralise the enemy.

In contrast, the Lucas expedition was a tale of errors: an unsettled navy ruined by the effects of political change and revolution, poor discipline, officers lacking experience and capability, political dissent and strife amongst the crews and a force completely inadequate for the task at hand. Due to its weakness the expedition nearly collapsed on itself and succeeded in nothing it set out to do. Lucas was inexperienced and indecisive as a commander. In the difficult conditions he faced, he lacked the leadership capability, moral authority or insight to make the right command decisions, while through his indecision he failed to save his own expedition.

Finally, successful defence against maritime power projection at the Cape followed a general pattern. The first and most important line of defence was a naval capability. Next, were coastal defences and landward defence forces. Though defence could be layered, co-operation and joint action was the most effective. The British succeeded best in its application because of clear strategic objectives and the allocation of sufficient resources for the defence of the Cape.

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M1/1360 Plan van de Battery Rogge Baay, Colonie van Cabo de Goede Hoop.

M1/3563, L.M. Thibault, Plan de la Ville du Cap de Bonne Esperance et de les Environs, 1793.

M1/11359 "Doorsnit over de lengte der Canon kelders van Batterie Amsterdam volgens de Linie CD, genoomen waar in sigh et geschut in de Embrasurc?? van agtersy vertoont." C 1790.

3.1.7. Elliot Collection

E3505, Plan of the Amsterdam Battery.

E3563, Military Map of the Cape Peninsula.

E3566, Plan of Cape Town and the Fortifications at the Cape in 1790.

3.2 **NATIONAAL ARCHIEF NETHERLANDS (FORMALLY ALGEMEEN RIJKSARCHIEF)**

3.2.1. VOC Archive

VOC4233, VOC4249, VOC4257, VOC4265, VOC4268, VOC4273, VOC4292, VOC4295, VOC4298, and VOC4326, Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren uit Kaap de Goede Hoop aan de Heren XVII, 1764-1793.

VOC4536 – VOC4541, Geheime Kommisie voor de Engelse Oorlog.

VOC4711, Buitelandse Regimenten en Militairen in Dienst van de VOC.

VOC4727, VOC4733, and VOC4735, Verhouding tot Europese Mogenheden.

VOC4826, VOC4920, and VOC4922, Scheepsmacht in Indië en Retourvloot.

VOC4960 and VOC4966, Bewapening en Uitrusting van Schepen.

VOC11145, Stukken van de Goeverneur en Raden van Kaap de Goede Hoop.

VOC11221 and VOC11222, Scheepsmacht in Indië en Retourvloot

VOC11343 and VOC11382, Departement van de Equipage. VOC schepen, algemeen.

VOC11513, Oorlogzaken

3.2.2. Secretariat of the Stadtholder (Stadhouderlijke Secretarie)

1.01.50 – 132. Stukken betreffende de verhouding van de Republiek en Engeland ter zee en de bescherming van Nederlandse koopvaardijsschepen tegen Engelse kapers, 1756-59, 1778.

1.01.50 – 132, Extract uit het Project van een Advis, om nogmaals aan het hof van Groot Brittannië representaties te doen over de menigvuldige depredation, 3/11/1757.

1.01.50 – 132, Extract uit 't Register der Resolutien van de Hoog Mogende Heren Staten Generaal der Verenigde Nederlanden, 20/9/1759.

- 1.01.50 – 132, Extract uyt het Register der Resolutien van de Hoog Mogende Heren Staten Generaal der Verenigde Nederlanden, 19/11/1778.
- 1.01.50 – 1139, Propose par le Coll^e de Meuron – pour le leveé d'un regiment Suisse au Service de la Comp^e des Indes Orientales, 12/4/1781.
- 1.01.50 – 1185, Aanmerkingen omtrent de Ziektens op de Hollandsche Oostindische Schepen.
- 1.01.50 – 1189, Eenige Missiven van den H^r C.J. Van de Graaff Gouverneur op Cabo de Goede Hoop, Van de Graaff – Stadhouders, 10/4/1785.
- 1.01.50 – 1192, Van Plettenberg – Stadhouders, 20/4/1781.
- 1.01.50 – 1198, Extract uit het Register der Resolutiën van de Hoog Mogenden Heren Staten Generaal der Vereenigde Nederlanden, 16/12/1782.
- 1.01.50 – 1200, Verbaal van den Capitein A.H.C. Staringh wegens zyn commando in de Oost Indien in de Jaaren 1789, 1790, 1791 en 1792.
- 1.01.50 – 1205, Extract uit de Resolutiën van de Heeren Staaten van Hollanden Westfriesland (10/10/1780) in Resolutie van H. Ed groot Mogd op de Missive van de Bewindhebbers der Oostindische Compagnie K^r Amsterdam nopens den Staat van Defensie der Etablissements van de zelve Comp^{ie} in Oostindien, 9/9/1784.
- 1.01.50 – 1235, Memorie conceerneerende den staat van deffensie van de Caap de Goede Hoop, geformeerd door den Goeverneur Van de Graaff, in den Jaare 1787, 24/9/1787.
- 4.1.3.1.4.1200, Kapt Staringh met 's lands oorlogschepen in Oost-Indie, 1789-92.
- 4.1.3.8.1235, Verslag van C.J. de Graaff, gouverneur aan de Kaap de Goede Hoop, betreffende de staat van het defensiewezen aan de Kaap, 1787.
- 4.1.3.8.1236, Memorie van toelichting van de gouverneur aan de Kaap, C.J. van de Graaf, aan Stadhouders Willem V op een memorie van Charles Daniel, graaf de Meuron, gewezen kolonel van een regiment infanterie aan de Kaap betreffende klachten over het gedrag van de gouverneur van De Graaff, ingediend bij de stadhouer, 1790.
- 3.2.3. The Archive of the Admiralties (Admiraliteitscolleges)
De JongXL28, Journaal gehouden aanboord van 's Lands oorlogship 't Loo gedurende het jaaren 1756 tot en met het jaar 1760.
De JongeXL34, Journal de la Campagne de Monsieur Suffren dans les Indes Orientales
1.01.47.29.124, Generaal Relas van Capitaine ter Zee gecommandeert hebben s'Lands fregat d' Jason gedurende zyne reize na de Caap de Goede Hoop, Suriname ..., 1782-3 en 1784, 27/7/1784.
1.01.47.27 – 157, Memorie van C.J. van de Graaff over de vestigingen Brielle en Hellevoetsluis en de middelen om dese in voldoende staat van verdediging te brengen, 1780.

3.2.4 The Archive of the States-General (Staten-Generaal)

1.01.08 – 4795, Secr Res van HH Mog van 1 Jan 1795 to Ult Febr 1796, 15/12/1795.

1.01.08 – 4795, Secr Res van HH Mog van 1 Jan 1795 to Ult Febr 1796, Instructie voor den Kapitein ter zee E. Lucas, commandeerende s'Lands schip van oorlog *Dordrecht*, 18/11/1795.

3.2.5 Archive of the Departent of the Navy (Departement van Marine), 1795-1810

2.01.29.01 – 442, Secrete Notulen en Bijlagen van het Committé tot de Zaken van de Marine, May – December 1795.

2.01.29.03 – 9, Journaal gehouden aan boord van 't Lands fregat *Scipio*, from 6/8/1791 to 17/7/1796.

2.01.29.03 – 10, C. de Jong, Rapport aan hun Edele Mogende de Heren gecommiteerde Raad ter Amiraliteit op de Maase, 21/9/1795.

2.01.29.03.28, J.J. Melvill, Journaal gehouden door den ondergetekende gediend hebbende as 1^e officier, Capt en daarna als Capitein bij de Vlag onder den Schout by Nagt Engelbertus Lucas aanboord van s'Lands schip *Dordrecht* gemonteerd met 66 stukken canon bemand met 450 koppen, 5/4/1795 to 18/8/1796.

2.01.29.03.29, P. Freteris, Journaal gehouden aanboord van s'Lands schip *Dordrecht* gecommandeert werdende door den Captn Engelbertus Lucas door den ondergeteekende Luitenant ter zee, 26/10/1795 – 18/8/1796.

2.01.29.03.44, E. Lucas, Journaal gehouden aan boord van s'Lands schip *Dordrecht* door den Capitein Engelbertus Lucas commandeerende 'slands esquader naar de Ost Indien, 25/1/1796 – 18/8/1796.

2.01.29.03.57, C. Benedictus (Secretaris), Journaal der reise met s'Lands schip *Dordrecht* onder commando van Capitein Engelbertus Lucas, 23/2/1796 – 9/12/1796.

3.3 **NATIONAL ARCHIVE UNITED KINGDOM (FORMERLY *PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE*)**

3.3.1 Records of the Admiralty, Naval Forces, Royal Marines, Coastguard, and related bodies

ADM1/54, Cape of Good Hope, 1758 to 1786, Commodores the Hon Augustus Keppel, Sir Richard King, George Johnstone.

ADM36/15257, *Daedalus* Muster Book, 1/11/1797 – 28/2/1799.

ADM50/36, Admirals Journals, Journal of Proceedings of Vice Admiral Sir Roger Curtis Bar t Commander in Chief of his Majesty's Ships and Vessels at the Cape of Good Hope, 28/8/1799 – 5/6/1803.

- ADM50/64. Admirals Journals, Vice Admiral Elphinstone, *Monarch*, for the period 4/4/1795 – 13/1/1797.
- ADM50/65, Admirals Journals, Proceedings of the Squadron under the Command of Thomas Pringle Esq, Rear Admiral of the Red, for the period 24/8/1795 – 19/5/1798.
- ADM51/1136, Captains Logs, Journal of the Proceedings of His Majesty's Ship *America* Commodore Blankett Commander, 16/2/1795 – 27/1/1797.
- ADM51/1261, Captains Logs, A Journal of Proceedings of His Majesty's Ship *Jupiter*, for the period 19/1/1796 – 31/1/1797.
- ADM51/1298, Captain's Logs, Journal of the Proceedings on board His Majesty's Sloop *Rattlesnake*, Samuel Gooch, Commander, 1/2/1799 – 11/12/1799.
- ADM51/1309, Captain's Logs, *Adamant*, Captain ... Hotham, 22/2/1799 – 21/2/1800.
- ADM51/1357, Captains Logs, Journal of HMS *Adamant*, Captain ... Hotham, 22/2/1800 – 21/5/1801.
- ADM51/1357, Captains Logs, Journal of the Proceedings of His Majesty's Ship *Tremendous*, Captain John Osborn Commander, 12/11/1798 – 16/5/1799.
- ADM51/1365, Captain's Logs, Journal of the Proceedings of His Majesty's Ship *Tremendous*, Captain John Osborn Commander, 17/5/1799 to 11/11/1800.
- ADM51/1365, Captains Logs, Journal of HM Sloop *Star*, 26/11/1800 – 20/12/1801.
- ADM51/1427, Captains Logs. Journal of the Proceedings of *HMS Daedalus*, Captain Henry Lidgbird Ball, for the period 4/2/1798 – 20/5/1799.
- ADM51/4313, Captain's log, *HMS Romney*, 1781.
- ADM51/4475, Captains Logs, A Journal of the proceedings of his Majesty's Ship *Monarch*, for the period 18/3/1795 – 18/3/1797.
- ADM52/2623, Masters Logs, Journal of the Proceedings of HM Ship *Adamant*, 6/12/1798 – 12/4/1800.
- ADM52/2343, Masters Logs, Log of the Proceedings of His Majesty's Ship *Hero*, for the period 1/11/1780 – 8/6/1784.
- ADM52/2343, Remarks on board His Majesty's Ship *Hero* at St Jago, April 1781.
- ADM52/3603, Logbook of *HMS Daedalus*, Captain Henry Lidgbird Ball, Esq, Stephan Stead, Master, for the period 7/7/1798 – 7/7/1799.
- ADM52/2506, A Journal of the proceedings of *HMS Romney*, Commodore George Johnstone, commencing 24/7/1780 – 24/6/1781, kept by J. Duane, Master.
- ADM52/2506, Logbook of the *HMS Romney*, 24/7/1780 – 23/7/1781.

3.3.2 Records created or inherited by the War Office, Armed Forces, Judge Advocate General, and related bodies

WO164/480, Saldanha Prize Lists 1781.

WO164/22, Saldanha Bay 1781, Pay List No 1 for the *Hoogskarpel* and *Paerl* Dutch East India ships captured in Saldanha Bay 21/7/1781.

WO1/178, Miscellaneous, Projected expedition from the Cape against South America, 1796-1797.

WO1/320, St. Helena, Governor's dispatches, 1793-1798.

WO1/323, Cape of Good Hope, Papers on the Expedition to take the Cape, Dispatches from its Commanders, January – October 1795.

WO1/324, Cape of Good Hope, Dispatches from the Commandant, October – December 1795.

WO1/325, Cape of Good Hope, Dispatches from the Commandant, 1796.

WO1/326, Cape of Good Hope, Dispatches from the Commandant, 1797.

WO1/332, Cape of Good Hope, Dispatches from the Commandant, 1800.

WO1/361, Military Missions, Mission of Hugh Cleghorn to detach the Swiss De Meuron regiment from the service of the Dutch East India Company in Ceylon, 1795-1797.

WO1/769, Other Government Departments, Home Office, 1797-1798.

WO1/893, India, Ceylon and East Indies, East India Company, 1797-1799.

WO6/20, Expeditions, 1795-1809, Secretary of State Entry Book.

WO55/1551/10, Colonial and Foreign, Cape of Good Hope, 1798-1827.

3.3.3 Records of the High Court of Admiralty and colonial Vice-Admiralty courts (HCA)

HCA49/7(3), Vice Admiralty Court at the Cape of Good Hope, Prize Papers of the ship *La Prudente*, Emmanuel Hippolite le Joliff, Commander, French property, captured by HMS *Daedalus*, Henry Lidgbird Ball, Commanding, 1799.

4. SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND PAPERS

4.1 THE BRENTHURST LIBRARY

MS052, Henry Dundas (Viscount Melville) Letters, 1797-1798. See specifically MS052/2, MS052/8, MS052/9, and MS052/14.

MS053, Curtis, R., Holograph Journal, 1799 – 1802, 'Process of heaving down his majesty's Sloop Rattlesnake in Saldanha Bay', February 1800 and 'Narrative of a cruise off the Isle of France', August to October 1800.

MS061, Lord George Macartney Papers. See MS061/1, Barrow, J., 'Sketches of the Political and Commercial History of the Cape of Good Hope', 1796; and MS061/2, Barrow, J., 'Account of the Cape of Good Hope' 1798.

MS063, Earl Macartney Correspondence with Henry Dundas, 1797-1798. See specifically MS063/3 and MS063/9.

MS40, Viscount Melville, holograph memorandum, 1796.

MS211, John Blankett letter, Blankett – Henry Dundas, 9/10/1795.

MS344. Viscount Keith Papers, 1795. See specifically MS344/1, MS344/2, MS344/3, MS344/7, MS344/8, MS344/9, MS344/11, MS344/12, MS344/153, MS344/154, MS344/155, and MS344/156.

MS350, Englebertus Lucas Letters, 1796-1797. See specifically MS350/6/1 MS350/10, MS350/13/1, MS350/18/1, and MS350/19/1.

MS376, Thomas Pringle Letters, 1796–1799. See specifically MS376/2, MS376/3, and MS376/6.

4.2 INSTITUUT VOOR MARITIME HISTORIE (THE HAGUE)

Anonymous, *Rapporten van de respective Collegien ter Admiraliteiten deezer landen, over hunne verrichtingen, gedurende den oorlog met Engeland en deszelfs colonien, tot het jaar 1781* (J. Verlem, Amsterdam, 1781). Missive van het Collegie ter Admiraliteit op de Maaze, op de Propositie van Zyn Hoogheid, om op te geeven hunne verrichtingen gedurende den ontstaanen Oorlog met Engeland, 23/8/1781.

Anonymous, *Rapporten van de respective Collegien ter Admiraliteiten deezer landen, over hunne verrichtingen, gedurende den oorlog met Engeland en deszelfs colonien, tot het jaar 1781* (J. Verlem, Amsterdam, 1781). Bericht van de Admiraliteit te Amsterdam, op de Positie van Zyne Hoogheid, om op te geeven hunne verrichtingen gedurende den ontstaanen Oorlog met Engeland, 8/8/1781.

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Private Papers: Milo Collection (F.E.J. Milo Collectie)

Milo37, T.H. Milo, 'Oorlog, Strategie en Tactiek', unpublished, no venue or date, circa 1940's.

Milo120, Copieboek van orders en instructies door Capt. Lucas, 4/08/1795–14/8/1795, Aan de Officiëren, 2/6/1796.

Milo120, Secrete notulen en bijlagen van het comit'e van Marine, 9/5/1795 – 14/8/1797.

Milo120, Diverse scheepsjournalen van: Hr Ms *Revolutie*, *Dordrecht*, *Castor*, *Bellona*, *Havik*, *Vrouw Maria*, *Brave* en *Cyrion*, 1796.

Milo120, Diverse scheepsjournalen van: Hr Ms *Braave*, *Bellona*, *Castor*, *Revolutie*, *Tromp*, *Eensgezindheid* en *Amazona*, 1796.

Milo163, Geschiedenis van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, betreffende een opgave en beschrijving van 13 belangrijke zeeslagen, 1595-1799, Undated and unpublished notes, circa 1940's.

4.3 NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION (GREENWICH)

Correspondence and Papers of John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich (1718-1792)

SAN/F/26 Naval Papers, January to May 1781. See specifically F26/48, F26/52, and F26/56.

SAN/F/27 Naval Papers, April to June 1781. See specifically F/27/28 and F/27/33.

SAN/F/28 Naval Papers, July to October 1781. See specifically F/28/33.

SAN/F/29 Naval Papers, October to December 1781. See specifically F/29/62.

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CREDITS FOR MAPS, DIAGRAMS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Shipping routes to and from the East in the age of sail. Produced by Staff Sergeant P.V. Benn.
2. The Cape and Surrounds in the late eighteenth century. Produced by Staff Sergeant P.V. Benn.
3. The Action at Porto Praya, 16 April 1781. Based on the diagram in A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*, redrawn by P.V. Benn.
4. Capture of VOC ships in Saldanha, 21 July 1781. Entitled "Plan of the Bay of Saldanha on the S-W coast of Africa showing the operations of the Squadron of Commodore Johnstone ... 1781, Drawn by Lieut: D'Auvergne of the Navy Commanding the *Lark*." It is uncertain where the original of this interesting chart is to be found. This copy used here was made from a copy of the original, hanging in the Wardroom, *SAS Saldanha*.
5. Plan of Cape Town and the Castle in 1786, by L.M. Thibault. Copied from CA M1/339, Map of Cape Town, 1786, "Plan van Het Casteel en de Stad de Goede Hoop..., in den jaare 1786." in http://www.tanap.net/_resources/images/activities_KaapseResoluties/c_plan_of_cape_town_groot.jpg (accessed in January 2005).
6. Vice Admiral Pierre Andre de Suffren Saint Tropez. Copied from "De Suffren" in <http://revolution.1789.free.fr/Journal.htm> (accessed November 2005).
7. French Corvette, circa 1790. Unnamed French corvette, copied from http://www.modelsailingships.com/ships/stories/hms_story.html (accessed in November 2005).
8. Colonel Robert Jacob Gordon. Copy of the original in the William Fehr collection, received from the Castle Military Museum.
9. Amsterdam Battery, 1785. CA E3505.
10. Chavonnes Battery, 1790. CA M1/1094.

11. Fortifications around Cape Town, 1793. French plan drawn by L.M. Thibault, CA M1/3563.
12. Attack on the Muizenberg Position, August 1795. Copy of "Kaart van de Situatie Tussen Baaij Fals en de Groote Wijnbergh, Aan de Caap'de Goede Hoop", in H.C.V. Leibbrandt and J.E. Heeres, *Memorien van den Gouverneur Van de Graaff over de Gebeurtenissen aan De Kaap De Goede Hoop in 1780 – 1806*.
13. Chart by E. Lucas showing the capture of the Dutch ships in Saldanha, 16-17 August 1796. The original is the Nationaal Archief, The Hague. This copy is from A.J. Knock, *Uit Liefde voor Vaderland en Vrijheid. Het Journaal van de Patriot Arie Johannes Knock over de Periode 1784 tot 1797*.
14. Interpretation of the Lucas Chart. This map was produced by Major H.S. Janse van Rensburg. In the process of creating this chart, cognisance was taken of the distance the ships were anchored from each other, wind conditions, the water depth and the nautical conditions in Saldanha Bay.
15. Map showing the arc's of fire from the Castle and the *Couvre face Imhoff*, 1793. Copy of "Plan de la Citadelle Du Cap de Bonne Esperance, 1793" in L. Degrandpré, *Voyage a la Côte Occidentale d' Afrique, 1786 et 1787...*, Volume II.
16. Vice Admiral Sir George Keith Elphinstone (later Viscount Keith). Copied from [http://www.nmm.ac.uk/upload/img_400/Admiral_Lord_George_Keith_Elphinstone_\(1746-1823\).jpg](http://www.nmm.ac.uk/upload/img_400/Admiral_Lord_George_Keith_Elphinstone_(1746-1823).jpg) (accessed in March 2005).
17. Henry Dundas (later Viscount Melville). Copy of "Henry Dundas, 1st Viscount Melville by Henry Raeburn", in A.M. Lewin Robinson (ed), *The Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas*.
18. Grand Parade and the Great Barracks seen from the Castle, 1797. Copy of "The Great Barracks and Lion's Head on a Stormy Day, viewed from the Castle", by Anne Barnard in A.M. Lewin Robinson (ed), *The Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas*.
19. Frigate action, circa 1800. Copied from the motion picture "Master and Commander", in <http://www.darkhorizons.com/2003/master/mc4.jpg> (accessed in November 2005).